EXPLORATIONS IN THE INCLUSIVE FITNESS MOVEMENT: COMMUNITY VOICES & VISIONS

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ABSTRACT

Bri Sikorski: Explorations in the Inclusive Fitness Movement:
Community Voices & Visions
(Under the Direction of Patricia E. Sawin)

This thesis explores the developing "inclusive fitness movement." With Fitness4AllBodies at its center, whose explicit mission is to abolish the Fitness Industrial Complex, this thesis is based on interviews conducted with founder Justice Roe Williams and affiliated fitness professionals and activists: Beck Beverage, Asher Freeman, Dr. Joy Cox, Dr. Courtney Marshall, Ilya Parker, Roc Rochon, and Lore McSpadden. From these conversations, it challenges the fitness industry constructing itself as an oasis divorced from "real life issues," but rather demonstrates how the fitness industry is both product and agent of white supremacy. Further, how the development of the inclusive fitness movement is not a reformist measure at its heart—at least in this network—but rather an abolitionist one centered in purposeful unknowing through completely abolishing the power dynamics that shape present understandings of the body. Ultimately, they dream of fitness as creating new networks and economies of care.

PREFACE

This thesis was originally created and formatted as a website that can be viewed at tarheels.live/inclusivefitness

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The community map presented on the homepage of this website is meant to be an acknowledgement in itself to the many individuals who are invested in this work.

Specifically, I want to give significant thanks to Justice Roe Williams who has been an incredible leader and educator in this movement. The same goes to Ilya Parker and Roc Rochon, who are similarly pioneers within this work and who make this movement even something that I could write at thesis about.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart to everyone who took the time to speak with me and be interviewed for this project: Dr. Joy Cox, Dr. Courtney Marshall, Roc Rochon, Ilya Parker, Lore McSpadden, Beck Beverage, and Asher Freeman.

Thank you to my wonderful advisor, Dr. Patricia Sawin, who has always encouraged me and helped me find a way to produce work in a way that also worked with my brain—I know it's not always been easy, but I hope that this completed work can be a testament to your patience. Thank you also to my wonderful committee members Dr. Antonia Randolph and Dr. Gabrielle Berlinger, both of whom have offered crucial insight and ways of framing this work.

Thank you also to my wonderful and ever supportive partner Eric who has always encouraged me in my work, whatever form that takes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ABOUT

Bri Sikorski (they/he) is a white, non-binary trans masculine, and neurodivergent graduate student and fitness instructor. “Explorations in the Inclusive Fitness Movement: Community Voices & Visions” is their degree-seeking thesis work for an MA in Folklore through UNC Chapel Hill. This thesis was originally created and formatted as a website that can be viewed at tarheels.live/inclusivefitness.

They began working in the fitness industry at the age of sixteen and began teaching yoga classes at the age of eighteen. Since then, they have been teaching group fitness classes for six years including yoga, cycling, and strength training and received their personal training certification in January 2021.

It was experiencing exploitative labor practices, homophobia and transphobia, and the fitness industry’s apathy towards systemic issues that brought them to connecting to the growing movement loosely coined as “inclusive fitness” and having the privilege of connecting with individuals who have been doing this work and carving out this path in their own communities, studios, and gyms for years.

As a graduate student, he decided that bringing their experience in the industry, this growing movement, and their academic studies to produce this thesis.

This objective of this thesis is not to be an authoritative nor final documentation of this movement. Rather, this thesis is meant to be a window or an insight into the incredible work that

people and collectives—especially QTBIPOC/BIWOC individuals and communities—have been doing for years to both name the fitness industry's role as both product and perpetuator of systemic oppression while simultaneously imagining new possibilities for the practices that were found to be built from love, connection, and resistance.

COMMUNITY MAP

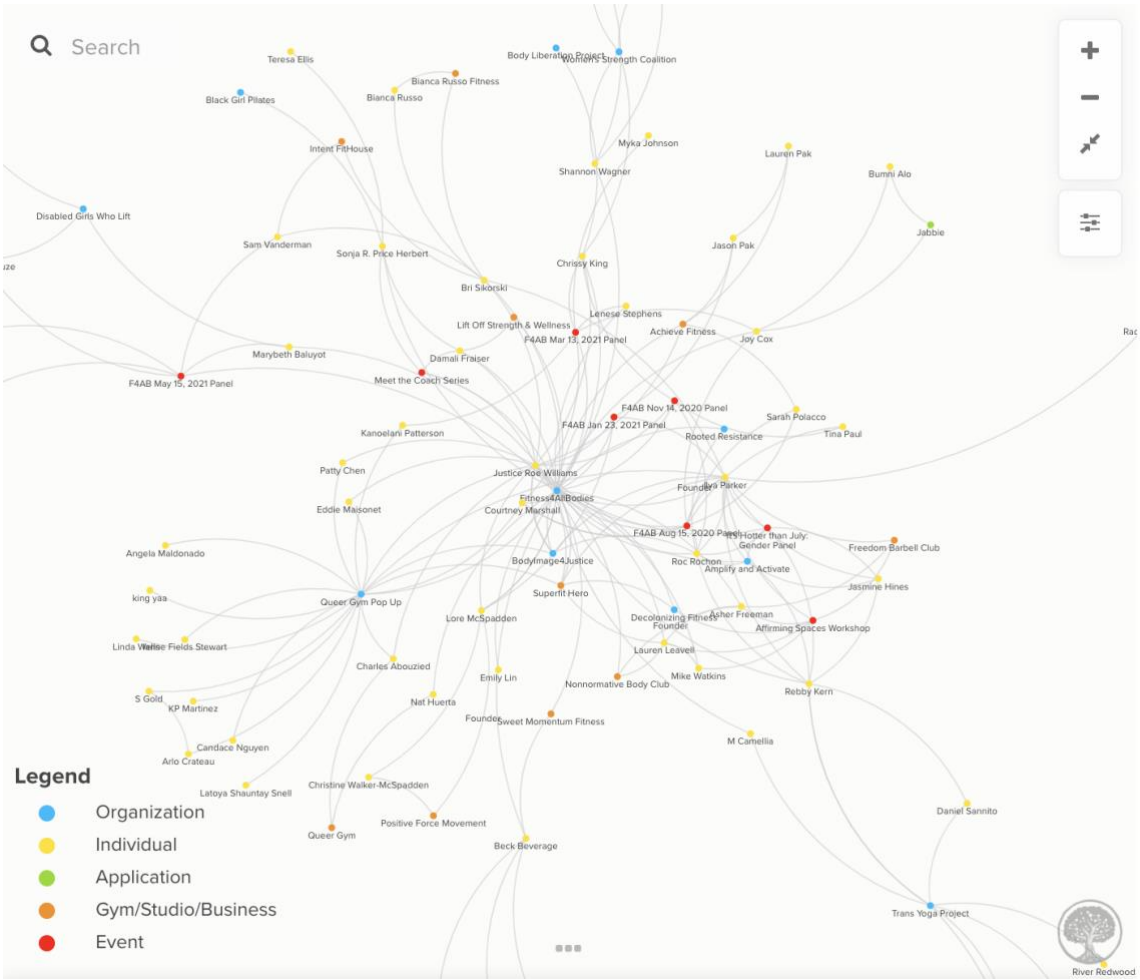

Figure 1. Fitness4AllBodies Community Map

This map is hosted originally online and can be viewed at kumu.io/bsikorski/fitness4allbodies#fitness4allbodies or tarheels.live/inclusivefitness. It seeks to demonstrate at least part of the network that exists between the leaders, activists, and community

builders of the “inclusive fitness movement.” This term in itself is limiting and does not fully describe the goals and experiences of everyone included even within this map, but has become a term used as shorthand for practices that don’t just push against “traditional” fitness, but entirely reject it and seek to create something new.

This map is guaranteed to be partial and incomplete as it is primarily based on my individual observations, research, and relationships. If you would like to change, update, modify, or add information about yourself or connections to elements on this map, please email me at bri.sikorski@gmail.com.

CATEGORIES

The categories presented on this map include individuals, events, organizations, gyms/studios/businesses, and apps/platforms. The definitions I created for each category follow as such:

Individuals — Perhaps self-explanatory, but this describes a singular person. Examples of individuals that appear within this map include group fitness instructors, speakers, educators, and others with this label describing their specific personhood.

Events — Defined as a discrete moment in time that multiple people congregated with a specific intention or purpose.

Organizations — Whether founded by an individual or collective, an organization is defined as an entity separate from an individual that performs specific tasks such as offering programming or events.

Gyms, Studios, and Businesses — Whether founded by an individual or collective, a gym, studio, or business is defined in this case as being a gym, studio, or other specifically profit-making place of business.

Application — Defined as a downloadable program that creates its own platform either on the phone or computer and exists primarily if not solely in digital space.

A note on organizations vs. gyms, studios, and businesses: *The division between these two categories can be somewhat subjective and there may be significant overlap. The defining factor for most is that gyms, studios, and businesses are required to make profit in order to perpetuate. While advocacy or educational work may be foundational to said gyms, studios, and businesses, most of their services focus on memberships and providing classes rather than being based upon said advocacy work.*

HOW TO USE THIS MAP

Using the previously indicated categories and labels, using the "settings" function on this map, you can specify looking at specific categories, specific elements of certain categories in relationship to one another, and so forth to see the many layers of connection and relationship that exist in this space.

Additionally, using the search function you can search for specific elements and names. For nearly all elements, there should be information included about the elements themselves such as biographies or descriptions.

PURPOSE & CREATION OF THIS MAP

While this web-based thesis focuses on the "inclusive fitness movement" as a whole, my focus begins with Fitness4AllBodies. This was put as the first element on this map and connections were extrapolated from there based on relationships between individuals, events and the individuals connected to them and so forth.

The purpose is two-fold: first, to indicate the reach and network created through the programming and efforts of Fitness4AllBodies; second, to identify the many individuals and groups that have been independently and collectively engaging in efforts held under the umbrella of "inclusive fitness."

This map is inherently political in its documentation given that the word "inclusive fitness" is gaining traction and whiteness threatens to dilute this term and its meaning in the same way that "body positivity" has become divorced from its Black, radical, and disabled roots. This map supports the claim to knowledge and labor that QTBIPOC/BIWOC have set forth that they were the ones to begin this work, not white individuals or communities, and especially not white cisgender, heterosexual, non-disabled individuals.

COMMUNITY VOICES & VISIONS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis centers around Fitness4AllBodies (F4AB) which was founded by Justice Williams in January 2020 and officially classified as an LLC earlier this year, its mission is as follows:

> Fitness4AllBodies teaches coaches, gym/studio owners, and people in the fitness industry to better understand how our bodies are connected to systems of oppression, how those systems are reinforced by the fitness industry, and how to develop a social justice lens and apply it to their work. We provide a space to come together from our fields of expertise to create new ideas and visions of what fitness can be in a way that honors and serves all of us without reinforcing patriarchal, white supremacist bodily ideals.

Between January 2020 and when this thesis is being written in April 2021, F4AB has held five webinars/panel discussions, launched its first educational cohort of twenty participants for its course on deconstructing fitness culture, hosted numerous discussions via digital platforms such as Zoom and Instagram including their monthly Meet the Coach and reoccurring Gym/Studio Walkthrough series.

F4AB visualizes itself as a hub where fitness professionals and enthusiasts can connect, share, and learn from one another in their autonomous pursuits to challenge the present status of the fitness industry. At the center of its work is the call to dismantle and abolish the Fitness Industrial Complex (FIC) which was defined by Williams:

> "The Fitness Industrial Complex defines and maintains power over our bodies through patriarchal, white supremacist culture. These mainstream ideas teach us that the white,

> cisgendered, heterosexual, non-disabled, middle-class, and thin body is the standard that needs to be aspired to in the interest of perpetuating a society based on racial capitalism, thus creating the image of the 'productive citizen.'
>
> The Fitness Industrial Complex is maintained by private companies that make huge profits from diet and fitness culture given that through white supremacist body culture no one will truly attain these standards and this failure is required for it to perpetuate. The fitness industry becomes a space to attempt to rehabilitate "non-desirable" bodies, or ones that do not fit the image of the 'productive citizen,' thus damaging our bodies, our relationship to our bodies, and our mental health."

Personally, I attended panels that Fitness4AllBodies hosted during the summer of 2020 and noted that it was one of the first times I had seen an effort that focused on bringing fitness professionals and their expertise together beyond more individual collaborations, efforts, or educational opportunities. While I had attended deeply informative events hosted by individuals, F4AB struck me through bringing people together in a room that they may not otherwise be in together either because of a difference in teaching modality, geography, and more.

From my own personal experience working in the fitness industry since I was a teenager and as researcher, I was interested in focusing on looking at the inclusive fitness movement as a whole rather than necessarily specific inclusive efforts or measures focusing on particular modalities. As a result, F4AB seemed like a perfect point to start charting this map to see who really makes up this movement.

The individuals interviewed for this project were based on who was featured recently as panelists and were continuing to engage in work with F4AB. There are many people I wish were included as interviewees, but either I reached out to and did not respond to my interview request, began involved more regularly with F4AB efforts after I had already completed interviews, and more. Given the tumultuous nature of 2020 for a variety of reasons, including COVID-19 alone, made working on this project quite unpredictable and had this been worked on in another year and world where a pandemic was not a factor, there are a number of things I wish I could have

spent more time on, including building out a more robust interview list to include experiences that are otherwise absent here.

The interview process took place over Zoom during the months of January 2021 through March 2021 with most interviews lasting about an hour. While I would ask interview questions spontaneously during the interview process as our conversation developed, I tried to ask all interview participants questions that centered around the following topics:

- How they would describe or define "inclusive" versus "traditional" fitness
- Their experiences with exercise and fitness
- What the "inclusive" fitness movement had accomplished or what conversations it had started
- What issues still demanded attention or needed further exploration in "inclusive" fitness
- Their involvement or connection to Fitness4AllBodies

Prior to our interview, we would review a consent form that explained that their names could be anonymized, they would have the opportunity to review their interview clips and transcripts, and could ask for any material to be removed prior to my defense date—upon which it could still be removed for any future work, but would be present for my defense—and that they could refuse to answer any questions.

After constructing the website where this thesis is originally hosted, including writing each section and organizing interview clips, I then conducted a video interview with Justice Williams reviewing each section including my commentary, what was included in interview clips, and asking for his insight. This is included at the end of each section as the video transcript.

I am eternally grateful to all interviewees and hopefully this can highlight at least a snapshot of their incredible efforts in this movement and their work as fitness professionals.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS & VOICES

Justice Roe Williams (he/him)

Justice Roe Williams is a Certified Personal Trainer, head coach at Kettlebell Justice, founder of Queer Gym Pop Up and BodyImage4Justice, and Executive Director of Fitness4AllBodies. He is a trans body positive activist and has been actively creating safe spaces for queer and trans bodies in fitness in the Boston area since 2013. Williams actively advocates for fitness being for everyone and the importance of trainers and fitness professionals using their status as gatekeepers to "act as a shield" to protect their clients and create safe, affirming practices and spaces.

Dr. Courtney Marshall (she/her)

A feminist fitness coach, OCR athlete, triathlete, personal trainer, powerlifter, Zumba and group exercise instructor—will discuss group fitness and larger bodies: what it means to be a larger-bodied coach, the impact of the invisibility of larger bodies within athletics, and the roots of the ideology that erases her type of body from the fitness field as both a participant and an instructor.

Dr. Joy Cox (she/her)

Dr. Joy Cox is a body justice advocate using her skill set in research and leadership to foster social change through the promotion of fat acceptance and diversity and inclusion. With 36 years living as a fat, Black cisgendered woman and 7+ years of professional experience under her belt, Dr. Cox draws on her own experiences and skillset to amplify the voices of those most

marginalized in society, bringing attention to matters of intersectionality addressing race, body size, accessibility, and "health."

Dr. Cox is the owner and operator of the Fresh Out the Cocoon brand, and a supportive force behind the scenes for organizations looking to incorporate diversity and inclusion into their practices. Her newest venture, "Jabbie" is an app that seeks to decolonize fitness standards and provide users with a weight-neutral platform full of support. Joy has been featured on several podcasts and media productions such as Food Psych with Christy Harrison, Nalgona Positivity Pride with Gloria Lucas, Fat Women of Color with Ivy Felicia, and Huffington Post's piece, "Everything You Know About Obesity is Wrong." She is the voice of an overcomer, looking to propel others into a place of freedom designed by their desires. Dr. Cox is a mover and shaker, undeterred by obstacles and fueled by hope.

Ilya Parker (he/they)

Ilya is a nonbinary trans educator, activist, physical therapist assistant, certified medical exercise coach, and owner of Decolonizing Fitness, LLC., a social justice platform that provides affirming fitness services, community education and apparel in support of body diversity. @decolonizing_fitness

Lore McSpadden (they/them)

Lore is a proudly fat non-binary trans person (pronouns: they/them) who has dedicated their life to helping people develop celebratory, safe, and sustainable movement practices; providing engaging and empowering presentations regarding how to shape a world that honors body diversity; providing consultation services to businesses, organizations, and fitness facilities

that are interested in improving their accessibility and diversity; and facilitating conversations regarding fat acceptance, trans inclusion, and intersectionality.

They are the founder and co-owner of Positive Force Movement, a non-traditional gym in Rochester, NY. The mission of Positive Force Movement is to make elite, top-level coaching and wellness services available to people who have historically not felt welcomed by the fitness industry in a way that honors the full selves and identities of all who seek our services; our vision is to build a world in which all people who have experienced systemic marginalization have the opportunity to develop a joyful, playful, and empowering relationship to movement in a way that honors the holistic needs of each person. They have been featured in articles on Vice, Self Magazine, Medium, Gymcloud, Well & Good, and others. @positiveforcemovement

Beck Beverage (they/them)

Beck is a movement educator who's teaching style is best summarized as "embodied movement coaching". Beck is a Corrective Exercise Specialist, Reembody Certified Apprentice Practitioner, Certified Personal Trainer, and the Owner of Sweet Mo.

Beck's coaching style is gentle, kind, and embodiment focused. They believe that movement is a the best tool you can harness to be more connected to the body you have, instead of focusing on the body you want. Sessions with Beck are collaborative, exploratory, and great for anyone who likes to venture off the beaten path.

Beck loves to work with people who want to use movement to be more present and their bodies and in the world, and folks who feel self-conscious about working out or movement in general. Many of Beck's clients come to them because they feel "disconnected", "can't feel anything", or because movement just "doesn't feel right". People who seek embodiment focused

coaching have often tried many different approaches without success, and are ready for a different approach.

Beck has lots of experience working with transgender adults and youth and is particularly interested in supporting folks as they transition. Beck is very knowledgeable about binding harm reduction and training pre and post gender affirming surgery. They also have experience working with folks who have auto-immune conditions, chronic pain, and folks who come from a wide variety of ability levels and backgrounds.

Beck has completed specialty education in the Reembody Method, TRX training methodology, Dynamic Variable Resistance Training, Loaded Integrated Functional Training, the Bio-mechanics Method, and more. They also have a Bachelor's of Science from Portland State University. They have extensive knowledge of trauma informed care and creating inclusive spaces.

Asher Freeman (they/them)

From Asher's Nonnormative Body Club website:

> "Hi, my name is Asher Freeman, and Nonnormative Body Club is my baby. When I first came out as trans, I began weightlifting with hopes that I could change the shape of my body to better fit societal expectations of masculinity. While I was only ever marginally successful with that goal, lifting weights gave me a far better gift. For one hour every day, I was in tune with my movements and physical sensations. For the first time since childhood, I began experiencing what it meant to be embodied.
>
> As I spent more time at the gym, I began talking with friends and realizing that it wasn't just trans people who can struggle to find a home in our bodies – it is people who have experienced trauma, fat people, people with disabilities, People of Color, cis women, and everyone else whose bodies are devalued by our society. My work as a body positive personal trainer is to remind people that our bodies belong to us, and we have every right to inhabit, nourish, and celebrate them as they are.

> I am an ACSM Certified Personal Trainer with a Personal Training Certificate from Portland Community College. I live and train in Philadelphia."

Roc Rochon (they/them/Roc)

Roc is an organizer and creator of Rooted Resistance, LLC a grassroots community-based program for TGNC and Queer B/I/POC people in the US South. Roc is currently a PhD Candidate in Sport Management on the ancestral territory of the Apalachee Nation, Muscogee Creek Nation, the Miccosukee Tribe of Florida, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida (Tallahassee, Florida). Roc's focus is on the political economy of sport, cultural studies, the body as a site for liberation and embodied healing through movement/ physical activity.

“INCLUSIVE” VS. “TRADITIONAL” FITNESS AND BEYOND

The creation and usage of the term “inclusive fitness” signals that there is a form of fitness that is not inclusive or that fitness, by default, is not inclusive hence the need for a qualifier. This section focuses on exploring what constitutes “inclusive fitness” versus “traditional fitness,” the boundaries and dialectical relationship between these terms, and their resulting application in fitness practices, spaces, and resulting rhetoric about fitness. Through sharing clips from interviews I conducted with fitness professionals and activists with a variety of lived experiences, backgrounds, and identities, I hope to show the way the conversations about this specific topic unfold, where there is overlap and divergence, and to map out the varying perspectives on these terms from those who are actively involved in their real life evolution and application.

Informing this exploration of what defines “tradition” is Handler and Linnekin’s analysis of considering whether traditions are genuine or spurious (1984). They note that tradition is often referred to as holding a sense of “handedness” and “boundness” in that the enacted practices are contained and are passed down by an “invisible hand” from generation to generation of actors. In this understanding, a tradition holds a naturalness to it or this idea that tradition was determined from previous enactment and designation rather than because of its present enactment and interpretation. Instead, through their ethnographic work with two separate cultural groups they “suggest that there is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and is

inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present" (276) and that "tradition is not a bounded entity made up of bounded constituent parts, but a process of interpretation, attributing meaning in the present though making reference to the past" (287). Namely, tradition is not contained and designated in the past nor does it entirely create a continuous line connecting past to present, but rather through its present enactment is reenacted, reinterpreted, and recreated making tradition something that is enacted and interpreted in the present, not contained in the past.

Thus, any form of "traditional" fitness being enacted is exactly that, being actively enacted, shaped, defined, and constituted alongside the same development of "inclusive" fitness. The question is in what ways, where there are boundaries, where there is overlap, and how "traditional" fitness may change shape in order to not face complete dissolution in the face of opposition from movements like that of the inclusive fitness movement.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN GYM

The origin of physical culture in the United States comes to a head at the intersection of eugenics, nationalism, and gender politics. As David Churchill describes in "Making Broad Shoulders: Body-Building and Physical Culture in Chicago 1890-1920," during the late nineteenth-century, urban city centers were continuing to grow and increasing numbers of middle-class American saw the cities they lived in as immoral, unhealthy places in comparison to the myth of idyllic, pure pastoral living. This view towards urban centers can also be attributed to both immigration and changes in industry. These cities were racially and ethnically heterogenous compared to countryside living. In these cities, there were also increasingly more "white collar" jobs for the middle class that did not demand the levels of physical exertion like working the land did. As a result, there were growing social anxieties that men—specifically

white men—were becoming soft in both body and spirit and worry over how this would affect the collective national "body" grew.

During this same timeframe, the developing concepts of evolution, heredity, and natural selection were being adopted to fortify nationalist, imperialistic, and thus white supremacist rhetoric. With the publication of Charles Darwin's works *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), ideas such as "survival of the fittest" and "natural selection" were adopted into this social context to implement the idea of "Social Darwinism." This was the concept that certain groups of people sharing particular traits were inherently inferior or superior. This concept was used by industrial capitalists in the late nineteenth century as "an apology for competition and force" (Churchill 2008, 347). Previously, there was continuous debate about the origins of different racial groups with those supporting monogeny arguing that all races derived from a single origin whereas polygeny proponents argued that different races descended from separate biological and geographical sources (Somerville 1994). With the introduction of evolutionary theory, "the notion of visible differences and racial hierarchies were deployed to corroborate Darwinian theory" (Somerville 1994, 256).

In 1883, Francis Galton coined the term "eugenics" to describe the developing "science" around heredity. Eugenics-based initiatives sought—and perpetuate today in the same vein—to essentially perfect whiteness through phenotypic and performance-based traits:

> "The widespread scientific and social interest in eugenics was fueled by anxieties expressed through the popularized notion of (white) "race suicide." This phrase, invoked most famously by Theodore Roosevelt, summed up nativist fears about a perceived decline in reproduction among white Americans. The new field of eugenics worked hand in hand with growing antimiscegenation sentiment and policy, provoked not only by attempts for political representation among African-Americans but also by the influx of large populations of immigrants. As Mark Haller has pointed out, 'Racists and [immigration] restrictionists . . . found in eugenics the scientific reassurances they needed that heredity shaped man's personality and that their assumptions rested on biological facts.'" (Somerville 1994, 257)

"Anthropometry" arose as a means to divide people based on physical differences. This focus on quantifying and measuring the body created the assumption that through the body were "various keys or languages available for readings it logic of biological determinism, the surface and interior body rather than its social characteristics, such has clothing, became the primary sites of meaning" (Somerville 1994, 250).

Dudley Sargent was an American follower of Galton and his anthropometric interests. Sargent was a physical culture enthusiast himself and a Harvard educator whose priority was building the "harmonious body," a body that is symmetrical and proportioned. Where Galton and Sargent schools of thought diverged is that Sargent believed physical and mental abilities could be developed rather than solely being procured by genetics. As a result, "building the harmonious body was something that almost anyone could accomplish, even by individuals who did not have 'natural endowment'" (Churchill 2008, 350).

As Churchill states, "Physical Culture was a broad term used to describe a range of exercises, athletics, and outdoor activities" (2008, 350). Within physical culture, there were two main schools of thought. The first "advocated gymnastics, calisthenics, and weight training as the best way to strengthen the body and build muscle" (Churchill 2008, 350). This constituted the first wave of physical culture and held distinctly European origins. During the nineteenth century, the gymnastics movement was alive and well throughout Germany and its separate states. With the significant influx of German immigrants to the United States after the 1848 revolution, immigrant communities would bring with them their forms of physical culture which were "ultimately adopted and augmented by a variety of American health and fitness authorities" (Churchill 2008, 351). The second vision advocated for sports programs such as football with the argument that games and sport taught "comradeship and values" (Churchill 2008, 350).

Furthermore, athletics were linked with nationalism and the idea that these games demonstrated the country's democratic spirit (Churchill 2008). This focus on sport constituted the second wave of programming offered and advocated for, but never truly replaced the first approach to physical culture.

Advocacy for physical culture pre-dates the adoption of exercise rhetoric by eugenicists, given that during the early part of the nineteenth century, "health advocates had encouraged exercise as a way of warding off disease … early health enthusiasts were not just concerned with healthy bodies … [but] 'healthy' minds and spirits to go along with one's body" (Churchill 2008, 344). The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was founded in industrial London in 1844 as a refuge to study the Bible and to transcend the regimented class divisions. Inspired by these stories of the YMCA in England, Thomas Valentine Sullivan founded the first YMCA in the United States at the Old South Church in Boston, Massachusetts on December 29, 1851 (YMCA, n.d.).

Colleges and YMCAs alike were founded offering physical exercise programs. By the late 1880s and early 1890s, YMCAs began to diverge from their more explicitly evangelical purposes to instead invest in gymnastics programming that "sought to build bodies rather than save and uplift souls" (Churchill 2008, 353). By 1916, 911 local YMCAs offered physical exercise programs, employing hundreds of full-time staff members responsible for these physical training programs. The culture being created was one where "training of the body was part of the modern routine of work, leisure, family, and volunteerism, part of the everyday experience of the contemporary and efficient gentleman" (Churchill 2008, 353). During the latter part of the nineteenth century, this intersection of physical health, muscular development, and Christian morality led to the rise of "Muscular Christianity" that was first popularized in Great Britain and

then the United States, which "provided a Protestant response to fears of effeminancy and moral decline" (Churchill 2008, 354).

The creation of the standardized body was also an ongoing project during this time. For example, University of Chicago athletic director and football coach Amos Alonzo Stagg began a program of testing and measuring students to monitor and track their improvements in growth and strength. He was not alone in approaching athletics and physical culture through the use of anthropometrics. As previously stated, these metrics were a staple for eugenics especially given that the measurements and attributes recorded were extrapolated to indicate other traits of an individual. For example, between 1899 and 1900, thousands of Chicago's primary, grammar, and high school students were subjected to an intensive anthropometric study where there were attempts to measure the height, weight, strength, lung capacity, hearing, and general fitness of Chicago's student population. This had been approved by the Committee of Physical Culture of the Chicago Public School Board. Chicago physician and school board trustee Dr. W.S. Christopher was the principal advocate for the study, oversaw the research, and presented a final report to the board. Based on his approach, the doctors in this study determined that "on average" students who made "greater intellectual advancement" were generally taller, heavier, stronger, and possessed greater endurance. Like his colleague Dudley Sargeant and this board, Stagg also was invested in creating a standard that all students could be measured against and, as the idea went, students could aspire towards building themselves towards this standard.

Petrzela's "Thanks Gender! The Intellectual History of the Gym!" picks up this lineage of the gym and names that these early gym spaces were overwhelming white and masculine. While the nineteenth century did place physical culture as a means of constructing masculinity—which remains a through-line to present day—this focus on creating the standardized body,

anthropometry, and leveraging biology for the purpose of finding scientific reassurance of racist and anti-immigrant sentiments dovetailed with the creation of the "homosexual body:"

> "Sexologists drew upon these techniques to try to position the "homosexual" body as anatomically distinguishable from the "normal" body. Likewise, medical discourses around sexuality appear to have been steeped in pervasive cultural anxieties toward "mixed" bodies, particularly the mulatto, whose symbolic position as a mixture of black and white bodies was literalized in scientific accounts. Sexologists and others writing about homosexuality borrowed the model of the mixed body as a way to make sense of the "invert." Finally, racial and sexual discourses converged in psychological models that understood "unnatural" desire as a marker of perversion: in these cases, interracial and same-sex sexuality became analogous" (Somerville 1994, 265).

These anxieties about the homosexual body, and its relationship to the mixed body, presented as considering men who regularly engaged in exercise during the 1930s as being "sexual outsiders, their masculinity in doubt by dint of their focus on physical aesthetics" (Petrzela 2018, 93). This resonates with Wienke's investigation of muscularity and its role in constructing hegemonic masculinity in that the role of muscularity in constructing masculinity has fluctuated and changed over time (1998). While male gym-goers had their sexuality questioned in the 1930s, during other time periods such as entering the 1970s and 1980s, this emphasis on the male body increases with muscularity becoming a central component of constructing dominant forms of masculinity. Meanwhile, women were often not allowed to engage in athletic pursuits and the ones who did were labelled as being hypermasculine (Petrzela 2018). Additionally, women experienced beauty parlors of the 1930s-1950s that utilized machines focused on "slenderizing" and thus feminizing the body. Conversely, bodybuilding became a space to establish hypermasculinity even with its connections to "hustler" culture—namely gay sex work (Klein 1993). Similarly, "physique magazines" and competitions acted as "discreet avenues for closeted gay men to find each other in intolerant times" (Petrzela 2018, 93). Arnold Schwarzenegger was quoted saying, "You will find homosexuals signing up to become members of the group so they

can just watch you working out . . . to them we are heaven" and reassuring men that they "shouldn't feel like fags because they want to have nice-looking bodies," using stories about "gang bangs" and casual sex with women, highlighting the ever-present construction of masculinity through fitness (Petrzela 2018, 93)

Upon entering the 1970s and 1980s, figures such as Jane Fonda and Arnold Schwarzenegger appeared as prominent starlets of these developing lineages of activity focusing on ideas of "wellness," "health," and engaging in a new form of work ethic centered around bodily transformation (Petrzela 2018). For men, it was an emphasis on muscularity, thus developing an exaggerated form of this pursuit through bodybuilding (Klein 1993). While there were women who were professional bodybuilders during this time (Klein 1993), places such as aerobics or yoga studios become "third spaces" created for women and gay men to congregate within (Petrzela 2018). In particular, Petrzela highlights the lineages of celebrity aerobics instructor Jane Fonda, Jazzercise founder Judi Sheppard Missett, and Esalen Institute's founding yoga instructor Pamela Rainbear Portugal in mapping these third spaces and creating places and ways where women felt like they could work out publicly and in community.

While Petrzela's analysis focuses on the dimension of gender, it is worth making explicit that these studio spaces similarly center whiteness much like the origin of the gym. She argues that these spaces and lineages are liberatory in nature, particularly through providing these community spaces and creating new ways for women to be in their bodies—thus pushing back against the frequent critique that wellness and fitness subcultures are inherently based in narcissism—there seems to be an assumption that because white women are creating separate spaces or developing their own lineages it is inherently subversive and revolutionary. It seems

worth stating that both resisting against particular standards while reinscribing aspects of dominant culture—such as whiteness, classism, and so forth—are not mutually exclusive. This is captured to some extent in Klein's ethnography with professional bodybuilders in California during the late 80s and early 90s. Devoting a chapter to female bodybuilders, he captures this gray area created where women have to carve out spaces for themselves in the industry—especially one he identifies as actively utilizing narcissism, Nazism, and fascist bodily aesthetics in their identity construction—while still not being feminists or having any desire to engage in any explicit form of liberation. This is relayed when asking one female bodybuilder about entering the sport and she shares that when professional bodybuilding was opened to women, it attracted people who wanted to stir things up, "feminists," and other people who were invested in the transgressive nature of the sport. But, at the point of this interview, those women had left, describing the remaining female bodybuilders as actually being devoted to the sport rather than having any interest in making a statement (Klein 1993, 162).

While Klein's work primarily focuses on male bodybuilders and the specific form of masculinity they construct—which he terms "comic book masculinity"—this focus on women entering gym spaces defined as a hypermasculine space dominates the literature of the early 21st century to even present day in regards to looking at the relationship between gender and the gym. For example, McGrath and Chananie-Hill (2009) interview female bodybuilders at a Midwestern university with particular interest and emphasis on women's gender in relationship to bodybuilding. While muscularity is historically and culturally tied to the ideal performance of hegemonic masculinity (Wienke 1998; Klein 1993), these women engaged in a "both/and" means of both transgressing and reaffirming expected gender roles. They transgress gender boundaries by continuing to engage in what is seen as "masculinizing" activities despite these

gender regulations while asserting their own femininity, while still reinscribing particular gender norms by still demarcating a line at which someone is "like a man," such as using steroids, or continuing to connect "looking like a man" to lesbianism (McGrath & Chananie-Hill 2009). This idea that women who are more muscular are lesbians is not a new narrative. The hypermasculinization of women who exercise can be traced back to the origins of the gym itself (Petrzela 2018) to the 1990s as presented in a scene in Klein's ethnography in California following professional bodybuilders. When a film crew comes in to film a segment about female bodybuilders, a man yells, "Hey, they [women] already got doctors, lawyers, cops, and now bodybuilders! The next thing you know, they'll wanna be queer!" (1993, 161).

Furthermore, as Moya Bailey states in "Misogynoir in Medical Media: On Caster Semenya and R. Kelly" quoting bell hooks, "Black women have long been portrayed as masculine and inappropriately feminine in popular media; athletes are popular targets for this negative attention because of their muscles and physical prowess" (2016, 10). Bailey points to the clear examples of Venus and Serena Williams who are often considered to be "too aggressive and too masculine to compete with other (read: white) competitors" as well as Caster Semenya, a Black intersex woman and Olympic gold medalist, whose name filled the headlines when her status as intersex became a topic of intense speculation (2016, 10). Semenya was subjected to extensive "gender testing" for the sake of confirming that she was "truly a she" from her hormonal levels being tested to her organs being X-rayed. The invasion of her privacy and global sensationalism resulted in her being placed on suicide watch. As Bailey states, "the specter of the Black woman's body at the intersections of socially constructed and medically reinforced hierarchies of biological difference remains a trope in contemporary media and dates back to our earliest uses of mass communications" (2016, 4). Even as advocates for Semeneya defended her,

they—perhaps unintentionally—reiterate the same anxieties that produced this situation of medical misogynoir and fear of the non-standard body:

> "Another official suggested that Semenya was being depicted as a monster, which was the kind of thing that drives someone to suicide. In the minds of those trying to protect her, affirming Semenya's femininity and womanhood was essential to her humanity, suggesting their own fear of the non-normative body" (2016, 11).

As a result, while masculinity and particularly exaggerated forms of it are central to fitness culture, the feminization of the space, culture, and practices do not inherently make it inclusive given the often exclusive nature of femininity itself—as demonstrated by the experience of Caster Semenya. This is furthered through Leeds Craig and Liberti's 2007 study focusing on a women-only gym franchise with the pseudonym of GetFit. In seeking to answer whether or not a women-only gym is truly "femininized," namely not making the assumption that the dynamics of power are inherently changed because of only women engaging in it, they find that while dynamics are different without men in the space, it still constructs an exclusive form of femininity—one that centers heterosexuality, cisgender identity (though this is not even brought up as a factor to consider), whiteness, thinness, and affluence. It is worth noting how while working class men may be more likely to turn to fitness as a means of engaging with hegemonic masculinity, women often access fitness as a means of indicating higher class status and affluence.

This exclusive form of femininity is produced through the gym emphasizing weight loss as nearly the only available goal for engaging in the space by regularly measuring participants and publicly sharing how many inches women have lost, asking questions such as whether or not someone was the same weight on their wedding day prior to the Marriage Equality Act being signed into law, and nearly all social small talk being centered around husbands and children. Additionally, white participants would qualify their interview statements describing staff or other

clients with racial identifiers and would explicitly talk about modifying the conversations around racially neutral topics—one participant said they maybe would not talk about skiing with a Black gym goer. Other conversations with white participants included talking about the racial makeup of different locations and comparing it with friends.

Fitness culture's exclusivity extends beyond solely individual actions and performances, as Coen, Davidson, and Rosenberg (2020) identify through engaging in a feminist, visceral geography, the gym "does gender." One of the ways that the gym does gender and guides gender performance and enactment is through how the gym is constructed as a "themescape," a place of hyperreality with themescapes defined as becoming "hegemonic, mediating the experience of environments beyond themselves" (5). This produces meatheads who grunt and slam weights and "cardio bunnies" wearing full face make up with perfectly tailored Lululemon leggings. While neither paints women nor men in a particularly positive light, it dichotomizes them along the basis of work in that men are both capable and allowed to "work hard" in the gym whereas women are not seen as legitimate practitioners and are silenced in this space (Coen, Davidson & Rosenberg 2020).

Additionally, through what equipment is available how it is laid out, the gym spatially guides gender performance and construction. For example, women are spatially guided toward cardio machines and lighter weights while men are guided towards heavier weights (Coen, Davidson & Rosenberg 2020). This was demonstrated at GetFit as well through part of the gym's "feminization" being an explicit rearrangement of equipment. While rowing machines are often lined up side-by-side and sometimes facing a mirror in a "traditional" gym focused on individual performance, at GetFit rowing machines were placed in a circle, essentially requiring that users socialize and orient towards one another (Leeds Craig & Liberti 2007). Additionally, GetFit

utilized a set of stations set in a circular routine that participants are meant to cycle through, similarly requiring cooperation while negating the need to assert oneself to use a machine otherwise required in traditional gyms (Leeds Craig & Liberti 2007).

While the primary lens of Coen, Davidson, and Rosenberg's study is that of gender, it is worthwhile considering how the gym as a themescape also exaggerates these other dimensions of positionality and identity such as class, ability, race, and so forth and the discrepancies that exist between the dominant cultures and identities enshrined in these spaces versus those excluded. Even further, one of the unifying elements of all of this literature is its true hostility appears in a coded fashion: through body size. It is through fatphobia that these spaces and the people within them practice racism, misogyny, anti-queerness, and so forth are maintained without necessarily having to say it explicitly. As demonstrated in pieces such as Wienke (1998), regardless of whether you are properly performing femininity or masculinity, fatness is the common "enemy." This contemporary ideal of thinness has been demonstrated as being racialized and racist as fatphobia—as it relates to Black women specifically—did not originate through medicine but rather through Enlightenment era beliefs that fatness as evidence of "savagery" and racial inferiority (Strings 2019). Fatness itself has also been described as being inherently queer, gender nonconforming, or prevents individuals from being read for gender performance in the same way as thin/straight-size people are (Longhurst 2014; Luna 2018; Kristjansson 2014). As result, demonizing fatness becomes a coded means of reinscribing white supremacist culture through privileging and enshrining the white, cisgendered, heterosexual, thin, non-disabled body while utilizing Western medicine as a means of justifying said hatred and exclusion of fatness. This should demonstrate that fitness or gyms are not simply neutral space where anyone can enter and decide to "work out." Rather, gyms and fitness are inscribed with and enact white

supremacist cultural ideals through the bodies they emulate and center and who is castigated within this process. Furthermore, even potential acts of resistance or transgression still engage in practices of subjugation to achieve their limited "inclusivity" rather than moving towards broader liberation. Additionally, the canonical fatphobia of fitness culture and spaces creates a coded way of engaging in racism, misogyny, homophobia, ableism, and so forth while being able to maintain the image of seemingly be a neutral space where anyone can enter and decide to work out.

THE BODY POSITIVITY MOVEMENT & CO-OPTATION

An important understanding that frames the conversation with the "inclusive fitness" activists and advocates I interview in the clips that follow this section is the recognition that the body positivity movement precedes and informs the current understanding of fitness we are advocating for and exploring.

The body positivity movement is thought to have originated in the 1960s as a movement demanding the "radical acceptance of marginalized bodies." This included severing the link between health and weight, addressing systemic issues such as fat communities facing employment discrimination, medical prejudice, and understanding the intersectional nature of fatness and other marginalized identities. As Frazier and Medhi (2021) excellently articulate in "Forgetting Fatness: The Violent Co-Optation of the Body Positivity Movement," the body positivity movement was ripped from its roots and violently co-opted in an unethical manner that leaves the original harms that the movement sought to address unresolved. Instead, the focal point was forcibly shifted from the systemic issues such as how fat people are dehumanized and the resulting consequences to instead focus upon ideas of self-love or the idea that body positivity is able to be accomplished on the individual level alone. As the authors acknowledge,

things such as self-love and empowerment are not necessarily inherently antithetical to the overall movement, but rather the issue is when these tenets become weaponized to completely replace the initial goals and completely decenter the main population affected, fat people, with instead thin bodies to create new boundaries around "acceptable fatness."

This bleeds over into fitness given the way weight and fitness are so deeply enmeshed with one another, where the gym becomes like a confessional booth to repent for erring and returning the body to a state of disciplined thinness and hegemonic aesthetic (Wachs & Dworkin 2009). The body is treated as a moral project where thinness indicates discipline whereas fatness indicates personal failure and—returning to the origins of fitness and its relationship to nationalism—a threat to the status of the "productive citizen."

"INCLUSIVE" VS. "TRADITIONAL" FITNESS INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Defining Traditional Fitness — Beck Beverage

Beck Beverage: One thing that I think a lot about is around the teaching style in our culture, just like the like how are we- how are we- educating people or how like what we think of how we think about learning.

Bri: Right.

BB: And it's very much like- if we think about the public school system and how children are taught to learn, it's this rote memorization, right? You're not actually, it's not- there's not an experiential process. You're experiencing sitting at a desk and filling out paperwork like being like another way of learning to be submissive, I guess-

BMS: Right.

BB: To do things that you hate and be still for a long time.

BMS: Right.

BB: Your- your- your life force is kind of taken away from that time. And we're also not taught to learn how to think critically, and so we go out into the world and we think I have a problem or there's something going on with my body. And I say there must be something wrong with me.

And B, then I need to I need to go to my doctor. I need to get a CT scan. I need to go to the chiropractor.

I need to see that I have a contact with a neuro person like all of the things that we do because we don't know. And out of out of fear, too, because there's so much that could potentially be wrong. And so diagnoses that we could have and we aren't actually ever taught. How do we engage with- with our bodies in that way, whether it's something sort of maybe bad that has happened, an injury that you've gotten, right, so there's sort of outside of it and then and then another side is just in general, like around the- the way we are not taught to engage with our emotional experiences. Think about emotions as being things that just like happen in our brain like I'm angry and because X, Y is right, but really emotions are body processes. They- they are the root sensation is the root of our emotions and sensations is that is movement. So, if we if we are not able to think critically and be.

Go around the world putting all of our bodies, stuff like all of our sensations that come up good and bad onto other people and especially like not, we don't learn how to be responsible for ourselves in the world and how to- how to be connected to nature in a way that you become connected to nature when you can feel the sensations that are going on around you like. So, I see that dynamic. So that's all the way I see that those dynamics playing out in fitness spaces a lot and even in the way that we're taught to engage with our clients is very like dominant submissive role. You come in, here are the exercises we're doing. And I am the trainer, so I know what I'm talking. And you're going to do ten of these, whether you like it or not. And why are we doing it? Doesn't matter. I said so. Who knows.

Yeah. And just fucking suck it up like, you know. Oh, you're, you know, you, you're having pain or whatever it is. No pain. No gain. Right. So. Yeah, I think that that I think that that's one of the major like. The main thing that I see is like the lack, it's an extension of our education system and an extension of the way that we already are taught to, to be disassociated from our bodies and our needs totally.

Defining Traditional Fitness — Roc Rochon

Roc: Yeah, OK. The first thing is that there's a monthly fee and that sometimes is visible or not. But sometimes you walk in and there's like or it'll be like "first two months free if you sign today." So, it's marketing just hits you in your face so and so and that's a part of it, but I also think it's the particular prescribed body prototype and this desire to always lose weight is absolutely connected to it. And I see that with sport and fitness and particularly with fitness in a way of like unless you are losing weight, you're not healthy. It's- it's just kind of this kind of oversimplified versions of what would it actually what it actually is because so that I think that would be a component like losing weight, particular body types, there's these sections in the gym, again, like the spatial arrangements in the gym. Right.You have the "meatheads" in one corner, which is people who have seemingly bulging muscles, who can't do a pull up, like who are exerting all types of masculinity, prescribed masculinity in this in the space. And then you have this always I don't want to say both my mind, but I'm just thinking about the gyms in Tallahassee, some of them that I've seen who have the women's- the women's section. So, again, the spatial arrangement in the gym that also breeds different cultural or cultural arrangements within the gym. So, like you mentioned, the cycling, there might be the cycling classes or just the cycling section, which typically is gendered and the dumbbells section, the-

the- the more free-weights and powerlifting section, all these different. spatial arrangements that literally overlap, like the town hall spaces arranged and how people are arranged, so it's like, I don't know if I'm veering off your question, but I know this is good.

I definitely think that those are components of walking into a gym and knowing, like- or knowing or even feeling like, oh, I can't really ask anyone for help, like all these people must be experts, I'm just thinking of things that I've thought before, things that that other queer and trans people have told me that they've done before. Like, I don't really know what I'm doing, but this person looks like they know what they're doing because of all the images that we think associate with, you know, whose body even belongs in a place like that.

Defining Traditional Fitness — Joy Cox

Joy: Right. The assumption is that people want to move their body to lose weight, not necessarily to have fun. So, weight loss is there, strength is there, right? And so the gym that I used to go to, so we had this cardio section and then right beside the cardio section, you have this strength training, such gym where the larger men were running and lifting things that seem somewhat unimaginable. And so you have weight loss.

You have strength at the core of the messages that that are said, followed by things like agility. And I think community is probably in there somewhere as it relates to group fitness. And I attended to some classes over time. And you see the same people, the same instructors, they kind of build a relationship with one another.

And even when I did Jazzercise, it was kind of like that. So, the sense of like community and togetherness and we're going to dance. But yeah, definitely, I think weight loss were the two main components that were in the center of the values as it related to the gym, besides like customer service and cleanliness.

Race & Gender in Fitness — Courtney Marshall

Courtney: Yeah. That is such it's so interesting that you say that, one of the things that I don't think I've ever thought all the way through was that at least I would say from where I sit white cis women are like the gatekeepers of cardio.

Bri: Yes.

CM: And white cis men are the gatekeepers of strength.

BS: One hundred percent.

CM: And I don't know yet if—I'm sure someone has done it, it hasn't been me—how that like racialize like gatekeeping, right, so they are the people hiring, you know, and creating classes and they so when they say, you know, they won't help, but then they say, well, we don't have any people, it's like.. But you create? And again, I always when I when I went into fitness or exercise? I don't know what they're calling these days.. wellness, whatever they call it these days, about how could I use like- how was I using the things that I have done for my dissertation and things I study? How was I seeing that play out in the gym? And to this day, I still am looking at like, how are these two workplaces together? Right. So if I so I look at the way now I teach

high school English, the way we think about canon and what counts as a book that's worthy of study is because like a group of people decide, "OK, we're going to teach this and we're going to write articles about this and we're going to promote this to the detriment of that." And now we have students and people think, "OK, well, this is the way it is, right?" See, it's like a part in The Devil Wears Prada when Miranda Priestly talks about the sweater.

BS: Right.

CM: But then these these owners and these fitness, these managers and everywhere we call them, like the wellness coordinator, everything, they give them a million titles! Then they act like "oh, we don't know!" [unintelligible] It's like, "Are you?"

"Inclusive" vs. "Traditional" Fitness — Asher Freeman

Asher: Yeah. Yeah, that's a good question. So, like one thing that comes to mind is a friend, Lauren Leavell is also based in Philly. And when we went into lockdown, we decided like we wanted to create a resource guide of everyone who's offering virtual classes, who is either like fat, disabled or a person of color and/or trans, mainly because of like what I'm like because of, you know, who has access to, like, training spaces and to, like, start your own brick and mortar space. Like, we just saw this moment as like a time when people with, like, more limited resources could actually be in charge of our labor and could offer classes as long as we have like an Internet connection, a camera, and a little bit of space. So, when we were like we- we had people mind, we already knew. But beyond that, we wanted to make sure we were like vetting everyone, because if I'm like suggesting like, oh, this person, just because this person's trans doesn't mean that they're like antiracist doesn't mean that they're not fatphobic.

So we had, yeah, we did like we were very explicit about like what, you know, like you need to, like, offer not just like weight neutral classes, but also like everything on your website needs to be weight neutral. We need to know that, like like we asked people specifically, like of these like four identities that like we collectively hold, like for those that you do not hold, like, what are you doing to, like, challenge oppression based on those identity is like within your work and- and, yeah, and then even after like so this was like a Google form. And obviously we're not going to catch everything in a Google form and yeah, don't expect it to be perfect. But like, after sending that out and posting it, like a couple of people got in touch about individuals who had some shitty practices that were that made it to the list that we didn't know about. So then we were able I was able to like reach out to them directly and talk to them and tell them, like, why, you know, why- why I was taking them off the list, but also, like, open up a conversation so that we're not like, you know, obviously, like all of us make mistakes and like, you need to, like, have space to learn, too.

And so, yeah, I think, like, the the values are like that I look for when I'm wanting to collaborate with people are like that people are like really doing work to, like, challenge oppression and doing, you know, like. I think I also like as like a white, thin, middle class person, I like if I'm like looking to partner with someone and I feel like I have like more like more ties to like potential clients or like people like people who might come to class or whatever, then I'm like, it's important to me to like, like choose, like if I feel like I have, like, something to offer, it's important to me to, like, partner with someone who has who does hold, like, more marginalized identities and like share like resources in that way.

Boundary Between "Inclusive" vs. "Traditional" Fitness — Roc Rochon

Roc: The boundary? OK, so I, I don't see I don't feel- feel, see, observe marketing gimmicks of inclusive fitness. Outside of inclusive fitness, it is a marketing gimmick. I think there's a different level of vulnerability. There is vulnerability, I should say. So there are depths to it. And there's also this idea of. It's not just an idea, it's embodied that it's really for all bodies, like there isn't one standard, there's no standardized anything. It's like come as you are. And as cliche as that might sound, it's- it's- it's true. It's like come as you are and you belong in this space, you matter in this space, and you don't have to be focused on losing weight to feel centered in your body, to feel whole or good in your body or feel encouraged to move. So, I think even around accessibility, around financial accessibility and accessibility of bodies, you know, there's there's always something that can be done with your body that touches the point in your body that you want it to. There isn't just the standardized notion of "alright, you're coming in, so we're going to do this and this and this," it's like if you do that with every client and seeing them in the same frame, I think that's a boundary that that is kind of it's really squashed with inclusive fitness.

"Inclusive Fitness" and Other Terms — Ilya Parker

Ilya: I think as far as the term, I feel like, often times when Black, Brown and Indigenous BIPOC share really complex, intricate ways in our own language about institution, the way in which it gets watered down when people are actually in alignment with what we're saying, that's- that's how inclusive fitness came to be for me, because people were like, damn, I get decolonized fitness when you're helping all bodies, I totally get that, but all that other shit, I'mma just call that inclusive fitness, that's how that's how it feels for me.

So it was people like jumping on my work, jumping all Justice Williams's work is Fitness4AllBodies jumping on, it was another comrade we had Noori, who actually was into horticulture and fitness, which was a beautiful merger that's a whole 'nother I don't think Noori getting lifted up enough at all. But so but it was very, very like it was layered and the people weren't ready for the layers. And that's what I found the hardest, when people water my shit down and it's not just glossing over it and whitewashing it, it's literally removing the complexity that needs to be talked about when Sonja Renee Taylor just did a recent IG Live or video something about body hierarchy. And then she was like, because people don't really want to confront the layers that create this shit, you know, you can say, oh, I'm on this rung, I'm on that rung. I see it. I get it. But it's like, no, you're not really peeling back enough to talk about it. And so, the complexion and a lot of the shit that continues to needs to be unpacked we keep, we keep, we can keep going on and on and on. And unpacking and just got a stamp of, OK, now it's inclusive because they work with large bodies. And that's another piece that is very frustrating. Like people reach out to me all the time and I love the work that decolonize and fitness work working with larger bodies. And that's the same critique I had with body positivity. It just turned them into a bunch of larger body cishet white women oversees- talking about body positivity, and they weren't even in like infinity fat sizes, they were like, you know what I mean? So that's how I feel, like it's just this, like rubber stamp or we're not rubber stamp. It's just like this. This, you know, I put the it's like it's like a form of a blue check. I put the inclusive check in my linked in bio and by now, you know what I mean. And you're not you haven't interrogated anything. You haven't looked at how all of the areas of your life that seeks to disrupt this, you know what I mean, this system is a work in conjunction with fitness. Fitness is just another

institution. It's not all "oh these five things I did and now I'm inclusive." And so I hope that makes sense. So flesh that out. Yeah. And yeah, well, I'll stop there.

BMS: OK, that was great. I think that that makes complete sense is like would it be correct to say or would it be accurate to reflect that on the issue that a lot of times with using the term inclusive fitness is that it's utilized as simply this label than as a process?

IP: Yeah, the issue, and it takes away from each specific person doing a very different work because Justice and I, for example, aren't just inclusive fitness coaches. I very specifically seek to decolonize fitness and the myriad of ways that I have lined out for years, for now, six, seven plus years. Justice seeks to disrupt fitness and it has components that are inclusive, and plus, I don't just want to be included. That ain't even what we talking about, you know what I mean? We talk about dismantling the system, that ain't got shit to do with you including me in a fucking system that don't work, for me. You know what? I'm talking about burning shit down and building anew. And that's the piece that also gets lost when we talk about inclusive because it's like, "oh, yeah, I'm inclusive AND I'm welcoming you in my space." No, you're the one fucking up the land taking up space. And I ain't- you ain't doing nothing of what I'm talking about specifically with Decolonizing Fitness. You're not you're not at all. That's the identity when I'm saying and I have used the word inclusive fitness, too, because sometimes it is a little easier for people to grasp that concept. It's unfortunate because I think if we made more room for the complexity and the layeredness, some people reach to that as opposed to us watering shit down so they can get it. You know what I mean? Because people are now pulling me into diversity and inclusion spaces. And while I welcome the opportunities because honestly, I get to eat, like I got to water my shit down now and keep watering it down because people are like, yeah, we're going to say your brand name is Decolonizing Fitness, but we ain't talking shit about decolonizing in this whole little workshop you do. You know what I mean? So that's that's what I'm trying to work through.

"Inclusive Fitness" and Other Terms — Joy Cox

Joy: I mean, I think that, like, I'm all for, like, new words. And I think that it would be cool to have a new word. I think fitness implies "fit." I think that it, if you can go down a rabbit hole of like, "OK, well, what does it mean to be fit and what does it mean to be? What does that mean?" And so, I mean, I don't have any words that I think that right now bring out those like, yes, let's change to this, but I think that unless we are clearly outlining what this fitness means to us. Right. Then you have this, it can be anything like you said, it could be anything and it can lose meaning. So when we say inclusive fitness, are we talking about just machines? Are we talking about machines and training? Are we talking about machines and trainers with different abilities, different identities? What are we talking about? And I think that that part lies within the core of how you define fitness and what that means. And yeah. And so I think as a researcher, this is probably a bad question to ask around the idea, because I think you can pick it apart, right? OK, well, maybe fitness works, maybe does it how do you operationalize of it? The conceptualization of it? I definitely like I think I like fitness more than exercise. Yeah. I think that there are a lot of negative triggers that rise for people when you talk about exercise. And and I would say when I possibly can I try to slide in "body movement." Right. It's like how you move your body. But I think sometimes that gets lost in translation as well. So yeah, fitness is OK with me right now.

We're cool, we're buddies. But, you know, it's within the perception that I understand what fitness is, what I understand fitness to be.

"Inclusive Fitness" and Other Terms — Lore McSpadden

Bri: What words were kind of used to signal, kind of like your values when it came to fitness. And how has that developed over time?

Lore: And that's the words I use?

BMS: Yeah, yeah, or you notice other people use to kind of like signal that you are working kind of outside maybe these more mainstream values.

LM: I.. It's- it's so interesting, so I kind of pausing in terms of I hate to say it so- like, I don't like how it feels to say it, but I can't deny that it's true. I'm very, very skeptical of most people who do any sort of movement coaching whatsoever, regardless of what words they use. I think very few people have done a lot of the internal work and continue to do the work and are humble enough to keep learning and to explore their own- and are willing to be uncomfortable, to move towards being more inclusive involves some very painful, sometimes sharply painful moments of realizing that you have caused harm and that your values or language or our techniques need to change. And that that doesn't really stop, right? And… so I have met a number of people in the industry who talk about how all are welcome and talk about things that they've learned about but make promises above and beyond what they're offering and will do anything from saying, "OK, ladies," to a group of people who they don't know the gender of or talking about, "Oh, it's not about losing weight, it's about, you know, getting toned, right" and "getting healthier" and not realizing that even that is problematic.

BMS: Yeah.

LM: And I think that that's something that Christina and I talk about some with our students and in our private community that maybe not as much openly as we could in terms of continuing to do this work, it never stops having moments of. "Oof, I could have done that better," "oof I need to learn about this," "oh, no, I think that the way I phrased that could have had a harmful impact." It's like doing work towards moving towards greater inclusion involves constantly willing to be vulnerable and constantly being willing to let yourself step into the knowledge that you have not done as well as you want to do in your values and there have been changes that I've made, like in terms of I used to, you know, like I've had like some half steps towards talking about what I do in a more compassionate and welcoming and invitational ways I. In my whole time in the field, I haven't liked talking about exercising or working out, but I used to be on like like alcoholic training and that was like when I was very much in that, like powerlifting, hard style, kettlebell realm and that like and it took me some time to realize that that word it is helpful for some people to talk about how they approach movement, but it excludes other people and that is inherently kind of training implies moving towards a goal. And so now, like there are students I have where I talk about spending time playing or spending time with intentional movements or like, and then and then, yes, some folks where we talk about training, but like really making space or if it's nice and easy to want to have for branding purposes, I don't have

you for how you talk about what you do, but that inherently in that there is exclusion and tying down your language too much. I that like- like relating to something as vulnerable as human bodies and how they move and the ways that we are vulnerable both in a moment and within our society it can't be too cookie cutter. It's- this work is constantly not knowing. Right.

BMS: Right.

LM: And so in terms of how other people talk about I mean, there are people like Ilya where I- like Ilya and I have a really amazing connection and I- like if like outside of my wife, if I had to, like, name one person, like they are consistently doing this work and learning and, you know, speaking out and standing by, that it would be Ilya then, like lots of other people, again, like. There are people calling their work inclusive where they're assuming everyone can get down on the ground, or people talking about, like inclusive body building, which to me is really weird in my brain to think about that, especially in terms of a body liberation, fat liberation perspective, and so I guess, yes, there are absolutely how we talk about what we do matters and talking about inclusive fitness, I think is much broader than talking about body positive fitness, especially if you're going to be serving people who, for whatever reason, has significant barriers to feeling positive about their body and making space for that.

Like there are people either because of chronic pain or lack of access to regular affirmation or, you know, a disability that they haven't reached a point of celebration of, if they ever will, like where we're like. Yeah, body positive fitness is very exclusive. Just but it- in it's very nature, and I don't think it's an appropriate goal, especially if we're looking at bodies that are influenced by systemic marginalization and discrimination and that it can very gaslight-y and the wording of inclusive fitness is significantly better. But in addition to how someone talks about what they do, I really kind of watch how they do it and how they do it with specific individuals. Not just how they talk about it to general broad audience on the Internet, right. And I really I don't know, yeah, I am usually like kind of a hippie dippy and a little bit into like. That whole way of moving through the world. Right. But when it comes down to coming to trust the work of other people within this industry, I keep people at arm's length until I really see the work they're doing. Like, I'll watch, I'll watch and I'll listen and like, you know, someone will recommend an Instagram page and like, I'll be like and then, of course, but like this sounds harsher than it really is, because a lot of these folks are very, very willing. But like haven't been introduced to certain ideas of inclusion and, like, there's a lot there's a lot of room for increasing mentorship within the field, both in terms of how you how we coach, as well as in regards to what you really need to know to move towards greater inclusion and equity in the work we do and so, like, when I say like I keep people at arm's length a little bit like that doesn't mean you know, ostracizing or I like I think… so I'm- I'm not a Christian, but I think about I think it was Maya Angelou who once remarked something about how when people say that they are Christian, part of the first part of her immediate thought is "Already?" You have that's like if you're, I may be misattributing that quotation, so but this idea that there are certain things where if you're declaring them to be true, maybe it's not as true as you want it.

BMS: Yeah. Uh huh.

LM: Instead of like this is a path and unfolding like it's an aspiration, we aspire to be as inclusive and accessible and celebratory as possible and we have not arrived there.

BMS: Yeah.

LM: So I wish more people in the field and doing this work felt comfortable stepping into the I don't know, like public doing so publicly, but I am still learning about this and seeking out that knowledge, if not necessarily like on blast on their Instagram page, by reaching out to other people doing this work and saying. I don't know if I'm doing this. You have to like and there's so much opportunity for growth and change and yeah.

SUMMARY

What constitutes "traditional" fitness? What about "inclusive" fitness? Joy is correct when she says that as a researcher, asking what inclusive fitness means opens up a Pandora's box of interpretation about whether that means the machines, the classes, the space, and the list goes on—in addition to the individual interpretations themselves. Nonetheless, through the insight of fitness professionals and advocates interview, we do get at least gestures towards the dialectical relationship between these two words and what creates overlap versus definition.

Connecting to the introduction offered in this section, when identifying the defining factors of "traditional" fitness, this idea of weight loss being at the center or even as a sense of requirement is referenced by Roc Rochon, Asher Freeman, Lore McSpadden, and Joy Cox. Beck Beverage explicitly brings in the element of this idea that in "traditional" fitness the trainer is inherently seen as the expert and enforces this authority over their clients by saying they are going to do a certain exercise simply because the trainer decided this would be the case. Whiteness, masculinity, and the idea of the "standardized body" appear throughout our conversations, such as Courtney pointing out that "white cis women are like the gatekeepers of cardio… white cis men are the gatekeepers of strength" and that white people are the ones running these gyms, hiring the instructors, and essentially keeping these spaces insulated in white cisheteronormativity. This is reinforced when Roc explicitly discussed the way the gym is

arranged and gendered, in addition to how traditional fitness spaces often use monthly fees, enticements of weight loss, and other marketing gimmicks that they do not witness in inclusive fitness.

These themes are highlighted particularly as the main themes that inclusive fitness seek to explicitly and actively address. Roc talks about how inclusive fitness pushes back against the idea of everyone doing the same workout and pretending everyone has the same needs or body, instead introducing the idea that fitness needs to see every person as a unique individual with their own needs and that there's more vulnerability present in inclusive fitness. Joy seems to imply that inclusive fitness, or at least an alternative to traditional fitness, is one that focuses on moving being joyful, is focused on community, and does not give the same weight to weight loss and centering masculinity. In the collaboration Asher did with another fitness professional part of this larger movement, Lauren Leavell, they created a resource list of inclusive fitness professionals which were asked to belong to one of the following categories: fat, disabled, a person of color, and/or trans. Of the categories that professionals did not have lived experience, they were asked how they were addressing the privileges they held in these identities.
This is echoed by Lore McSpadden's comments, that they do not see many people in the fitness industry digging into the process of unpacking these areas of privilege and how systemic systems like racism, fatphobia, and more are inherently so integrated into fitness that it takes considerable effort and "sharply painful" experiences to deconstruct it even on an individual level. Lore highlights that inclusive fitness is not a label, but an ever-evolving process. This was echoed in Asher's comments about how some professionals they put on their resource list were said to have engaged in particular oppressive behaviors, but also that there was a need to open up a

conversation around it with them even if they were removed from the list because unlearning seems to be a significant part of this process.

Ilya Parker makes a crucial distinction between inclusive fitness versus other specific aims of completely dismantling fitness as an industry and "burning it down." They share how when BIPOC introduce a term or idea, it is co-opted and completely watered down which holds echoes to the violent co-option of the body positivity movement. They emphasize that this is a topic with many layers and that many who approach inclusive fitness still want inclusive fitness to simply be a stamp to put on their work without actually doing the necessary work to unpack what makes fitness not inclusive in the first place, much less that the ultimate goal is not simply inclusion for many people, but a completely dismantling of the current system.

REFLECTIONS WITH JUSTICE WILLIAMS

Transcript from Video Interview

Bri: Okay, so the first thing that I was going to, you know, have your commentary on is one of the first sections that, um, I end up talking about on this website is talking about just the term themselves of "traditional" versus "inclusive" fitness, um, and essentially talking about just like the history of physical culture in America and how it originated in like the late 19th century, all of the evolutions it went up to to get to the point where we are today. And in the interview clips that a number of people share, um, they talk about how, uh, they end up defining "traditional" fitness vs. "inclusive" fitness and this idea that, you know, inclusive fitness this term itself can be a bit limiting or, um, you know, be a little bit summarizing for larger and more complex issues while also taking the time to point out, you know, what they define as like the mainstream of fitness, um, so yeah, they give a variety of answers but I would be interested to hear about kind of your thoughts on that discussion.

Justice: Thanks for- thanks for including me in this discussion, Bri. I think of… because the way that I was brought up, um, historically doesn't start in the 19th century, you know, I think a little bit about the Bible as a historical context, right, that helps us to understand how we've internalized even these toxic ideas beyond that century, right? There was established- establishment of otherness and separation even beyond how we say we cemented these ideas, right, so I think it's from the beginning of the illumination of the intellectual. So what do I mean by that? People who could read and write and people who had the privilege to learn how to read and write, right. And therefore, that transcription or their trend that- that information the way it

was harness during that time and then reproduced out to us as literal facts within our own experiences and lives. So I would say it begins even deeper than that and if people don't understand that this framework generally is beyond all sight, right, that we are unable to really change or recreate it, it still is established as some form of norm and- and in that norm, instead of searching for ways to change it, we find ways to get closer and connected in relation to it. So that because there's some elements of privilege that we receive from it, everyone doesn't matter, race, class, doesn't matter, these others- otherness we all have a piece of privilege that we're afraid to speak about or talk to right? I think that if, um, we were able to illuminate that, therefore, we can actively see the otherness within the fitness industry and what are the roots of how we identify the otherness within our own bodies and in the bodies we work with.

EXPERIENCES WITH FITNESS & EXERCISE

While I have discussed the history of fitness as a field of physical culture and how it plays out through the lens of "traditional "versus "inclusive fitness, what about defining the activity itself? This section looks at two parts to this question: first, what interviewee's experiences with exercise and fitness are and how that informs their involves in "inclusive" fitness; second, how both implicitly and explicitly what activities are considered "exercise" or "fitness" through their answers. Does "inclusive" fitness seek to not just change the way "standard" exercises are approached, but in fact what constitutes the concept of "exercise" or "fitness" itself? Through the interview clips that follow this introduction, there are a variety of explorations around this topic and questioning what defines what is considered "canon" within exercise and fitness, as Courtney Marshall names.

TRADITION

Much like the terms "inclusive" versus "traditional" fitness themselves and how mainstream fitness continues to adopt and co-opt movements such as body positivity to serve its purposes, the evolution of what is considered to be "fitness" or "exercise" follows the same route. It is not as though "traditional" fitness has remained identical to its introduction during the nineteenth century. Rather, it similarly follows suit of Handler and Linnekin's work on tradition

in that what is considered to be "traditional" or "tradition" is consistently being actively constituted in the present moment.

An excellent example of this is the ironic integration of the "anti-gym" into what is considered mainstream fitness, such is the case with Crossfit. Conceived of in 1996 as Cross-Fit and incorporated in 2000, Crossfit, Inc. marketed itself as a contrarian "anti-gym" shaking up the industry. In its April 2007 issue of "The CrossFit Journal Articles," one of the founders, Greg Glassman writes "[f]rom the beginning, the aim of CrossFit has been to forge a broad, general, and *inclusive* fitness… In sum, our specialty is not specializing" (emphasis added). Glassman writes that CrossFit's ethos is to prescribe workouts that are "constantly varied, high intensity, functional movement" with "functional movement" defined as:

> "…universal motor recruitment patterns; they are performed in a wave of contraction from core to extremity; and they are compound movements—i.e., they are multi-joint. They are natural, effective, and efficient locomotors of body and external objects. But no aspect of functional movements is more important than their capacity to move large loads over long distances, and to do so quickly. Collectively, these three attributes (load, distance, and speed) uniquely qualify functional movements for the production of high power. Intensity is defined exactly as power, and intensity is the independent variable most commonly associated with maximizing favorable adaptation to exercise. Recognizing that the breadth and depth of a program's stimulus will determine the breadth and depth of the adaptation it elicits, our prescription of functionality and intensity is constantly varied. We believe that preparation for random physical challenges—i.e., unknown and unknowable events—*is at odds with fixed, predictable, and routine regimens*" (Glassman 2007, 1-2, emphasis added).

We will return to this idea of the "rep" or repetition of a movement in time, but to continue to flesh out the picture of what makes CrossFit "contrarian" is that it sought to expand and *measure* strength in a way that does not feel like so much of a divergence from the history of exercise, but rather hailing to American fitness's origin in anthropometry. Glassman writes that

"[w]e call this approach 'evidence-based fitness' … CrossFit is empirically driven, clinically tested, and community developed" (Glassman 2007, 2).

In writing explicitly about how "fitness" is defined by CrossFit, Glassman writes:

> "We've come to see increased work capacity as the holy grail of performance improvement and all other common metrics like VO2 max, lactate threshold, body composition, and even strength and flexibility as being correlates—derivatives, even. We'd not trade improvements in any other fitness metric for a decrease in work capacity" (Glassman 2007, 2).

Further, in the October 2002 issue of CrossFit journal, Glassman writes about the supposed vacuum that "mainstream" fitness has created where strength remains undefined or defined solely by a few metrics, like the aforementioned focus on VO2 max, lactate threshold, and other measures. Not unlike Dudley Sargeant or other followers of Galton, Glassman creates CrossFit as a means of countering the "fraud and farce" of "mainstream" fitness that he claims does not clearly define what fitness programs are meant to produce. Instead, CrossFit is introduced to redefine the "athlete" and "fitness" itself where they explicitly say their "view of fitness is a contrarian view" (Glassman 2002, 1). Their metric and definition of fitness is as follows: "CrossFit makes use of three different standards or models for evaluating and guiding fitness. Collectively, these three standards define the CrossFit view of fitness. The first is based on the 10 general physical skills widely recognized by exercise physiologists. The second standard, or model, is based on the performance of athletic tasks, while the third is based on the energy systems that drive all human action" (Glassman 2002, 1).

These ten general physical skills are as follows:

1. "Cardiovascular/respiratory endurance – The ability of body systems to gather, process, and deliver oxygen.
2. Stamina – The ability of body systems to process, deliver, store, and utilize energy.
3. Strength – The ability of a muscular unit, or combination of muscular units, to apply force.

4. Flexibility – the ability to maximize the range of motion at a given joint.
5. Power – The ability of a muscular unit, or combination of muscular units, to apply maximum force in minimum time.
6. Speed – The ability to minimize the time cycle of a repeated movement.
7. Coordination – The ability to combine several distinct movement patterns into a singular distinct movement.
8. Agility – The ability to minimize transition time from one movement pattern to another.
9. Balance – The ability to control the placement of the bodies center of gravity in relation to its support base.
10. Accuracy – The ability to control movement in a given direction or at a given intensity" (Glassman 2002, 4).

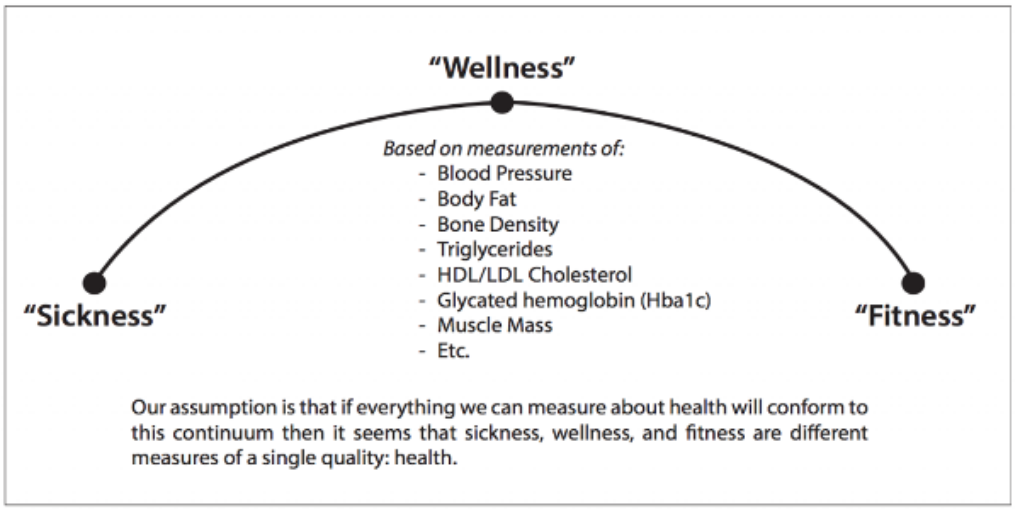

Figure 2. CrossFit's Sickness-Wellness-Fitness Continuum

This use of measurement and quantification continues in defining the terms "sickness," "wellness," and "fitness," stating that they are along a singular continuum measuring one "single quality: health" (Glassman 2002, 3). It is worth noting how, again, this idea of quantification remains central given that they say to use blood pressure, body fat, bone density, triglyceride levels, and more as a means of quantifying these qualities. Furthermore, it is worth noting how these measures are not based on performance whatsoever, but rather solely focused on the body in itself.

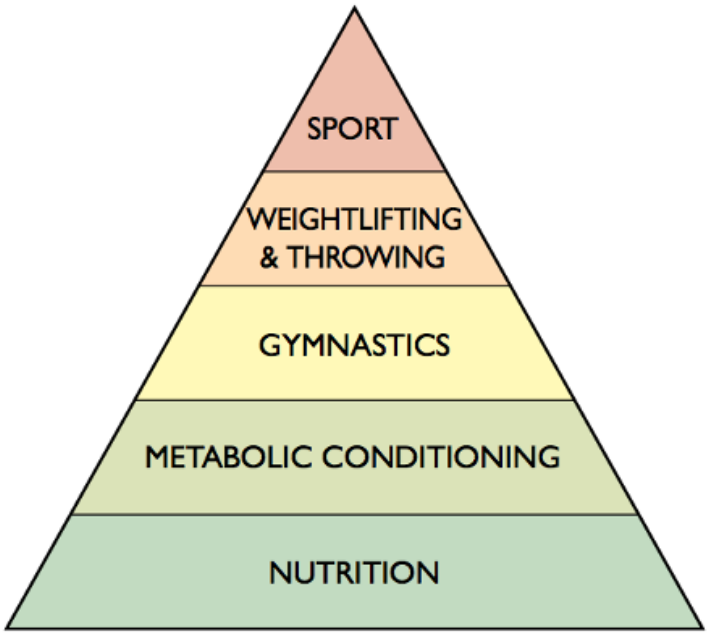

Figure 3. CrossFit's Theoretical Hierarchy of Development

Returning to what constitutes the CrossFit definition of fitness and exercise, in terms of programming itself, CrossFit recommends the use of a number of types of physical modalities including gymnastics, weightlifting/throwing, and sport. There are a number of elements that could be unpacked here such as why gymnastics is not included in sport, and so forth, but the main pieces I wish to highlight are the following: first, that this canonizes particular movements as being "legitimate," naming gymnastics, weightlifting/throwing, and sport; second, it begs the question of what exactly is contrarian about a methodology that is using the original forms of physical culture that were endorsed in the nineteenth century during the development of physical culture in the United States; third, the statement associated with this pyramid is "we don't deliberately order these components but *nature* will" (emphasis added). Shortly after, in recommending how to create a program, Glassman offers "strive to blur distinctions between

‘cardio’ and strength training. *Nature* has no regard for this distinction or any other, including our ten physical adaptations” (2002, 9, emphasis added).

I highlight each of these pieces because it echoes Handler and Linnekin’s work with tradition and how nature and naturalness were common elements used in arguing why something existed as a form of tradition or cultural authority rather than acknowledging tradition being constructed or created in the present. CrossFit is only one example of a “disruptor” that uses the idea of “returning” to this “natural” state of fitness to assert its claim to authority. It creates a paradox of something both being natural/pre-existing and a new disruptor all at once, only leaving, as Handler and Linnekin argue, the reality that concepts of tradition and, in this case, the standardized are being actively constituted and constructed in the present moment.

Additionally, for a gym that is so “disruptive” and “contrarian,” it has over 15,000 affiliate gyms worldwide compared to Planet Fitness—one of the largest franchise gym operations in the United States—which sits at just over 2,000 locations worldwide and the YMCA with 2,700 U.S. locations. Furthermore, for a gym being so destabilizing and adverse to the fitness industry CrossFit has a history of sexism, sexual harassment, racism, transphobia, homophobia, fatphobia, and ableism with Greg Glassman announcing an early retirement after making racist remarks about George Floyd during a private Zoom call with gym owners during June 2020 (Rosman 2020; Demby 2013; Heffernan 2014; Ruiz 2014; Helsel 2020). On a completely different spectrum, SoulCycle, a boutique cycling franchise that has expanded to other workouts that offers classes both in-person and virtually faces nearly identical issues (Petrzela 2021; Salo 2020; Smith 2020). At the end of the day, what is defined as exercise and fitness will always expand to encapsulate even the very modalities that claim to destabilize it. The sole requirement seems to be the modality needing to hold whiteness at its center and

ultimately enact the many ways white supremacy lays its claim, such as through fatphobia and ableism, and perpetuate the very mission that American physical culture originated from: race-science and eugenics.

LIMINALITY/LIMINOID

Another concept worth introducing to this discussion about what defines "fitness" and "exercise" and how it is enacted in Victor Turner's concepts of the liminal and liminoid. I want to make explicit that there are both differences and spaces of overlap between sport and fitness. Returning to the introduction of physical culture in the United States, there were two schools of thought when it came to exercise: a first wave of physical culture that advocated for gymnastics, calisthenics, and weight training; a second wave that followed promoting athletics or sports, particularly linking athletics with nationalism (Churchill 2008). Since these developments, there have remained both differences and spaces of intersection—for example, an athlete engages in fitness practices in order to engage in sports whereas a recreational gym-goer does not necessarily engage in competition or "sport" depending on how we define it.

A quick sidebar is it is interesting to note the trend in expanding the definition of athlete to include people who regularly work out in the gym with particular goals but whom may never necessarily compete in any form—or the creation of "games" specifically so these newfound athletes do have a sport to participate in. Returning to our quick, easy, and popular example of CrossFit, it is defined as "a sport—the 'sport of fitness." Which, where does one begin to untangle the semantic value of that sentence?

Similarly, just because there is competition involved does not all forms of fitness are equal with shared values and intentions. This was a primary difference between bodybuilders—who do compete but through presenting, conforming to, and shaping particular bodily

aesthetics—and, say, powerlifters who compete through demonstrating a body's "function" and strength (Klein 1993). For bodybuilders, actual demonstrated strength is not required, but rather the impression and aesthetic of strength by signing it via muscularity is demanded. Thus, there seems to be entry points into fitness that come from two different directions that may meet in the middle: those entering through sport and "function"—such as having to perform a specific athletic skillset—and those entering by way of aesthetic and impression. While these two directions can certainly overlap and are not mutually exclusive, where and how they meet relates to Turner's concepts.

Turner defines liminality as collective, pre-industrial, ritual-based practices whereas liminoid practices and spaces are post-industrial, individual, leisure-based social acts that occur due to this absence of more ritual-based points of transformation (as cited in Rowe 1998). Within this paradigm, he places sport within the category of the liminoid emphasizing its individual and leisure-based nature, a concept that has been met with both affirmation and critique. Rowe offers the critique that sport belongs more aptly within the liminal-ritual category arguing that sport provides the "dynamic, creative, and transformative force in our social life" that Turner attributes to liminal-ritual (1998, 145).

Once again, sport is not all-encompassing of what constitutes fitness and vice versa, but holding onto this concept of the liminal-ritual and its transformative force provides both questions and a frame to consider where some of these similarities and divergences are for traditional and inclusive forms of fitness—their role in transformation, upon whom the transformation is happening, and the purpose of said transformation. While Pronger argues that fitness as a technology puts limitations upon the transcendental quality and possibilities of the body (2002), Farber demonstrates that there may be a both/and space available where fitness is

designated as a ‘trans practice’ allowing for transcendence and transformation in fitness while still aspiring to goals nested within dominant performances of masculinity (2016). Additionally, Pronger and Farber are talking about opposite or at least divergent approaches to the area of fitness: one where individuals at least theoretically have the ability to ascribe to dominant culture (the inclusive fitness movement would point out how traditional fitness relies on people failing at this task to perpetuate itself) versus those who need to engage in it for safety or who will always be seen as playing at it versus truly embodying it (aka trans men not being seen as “real men”).

SPORT, FITNESS & PERFORMANCE

Finally, the actual act and practice of fitness and sport need to be considered as a performance in and of itself, as Broderick Chow highlights in his work, “A Professional Body: Remembering, repeating, and working out masculinities in fin-de-siècle physical culture.” Chow focuses on the aspect of repetition and its role in physical culture: “Physical culture is ‘repeated’ in the bodies of men and women who practise fitness culture today. Despite enormous diversity of fitness practices in the contemporary moment (running, yoga, CrossFit) sculpting the ‘built’ body has remained remarkably consistent over the past century” (2015, 31).

Even more specific, Chow hones in on the actual performance of the repetition of exercise or the “rep:”

> “Fitness culture is built on repetition. Bodybuilding and strength training forums discuss ‘rep ranges’ and the relative benefits of ‘high rep’ and ‘low rep’ programmes. The UK fitness clothing company Repraw incorporates the word into its name. To practise fitness is to repeat a set of movements or gestures. When I train, I try to ‘get the reps in’. A normal session in the gym might contain twenty five repetitions of squat, snatch, deadlift or clean and jerk on a ‘work weight’ and even more repetitions with the empty Olympic bar, grouped into ‘sets’. I repeat, adding increasingly heavier weights so that my body adapts, grows bigger, stronger (a concept known as ‘progressive overload’). I repeat for the affective thrill, because a single rep on a 120-kg deadlift makes my heart pound and

> my breath come faster. I repeat so I will make 'gains'. This labour of repetition is pleasurable and awful in equal intensity" (Chow 2015, 32).

Through this focus on the role of repetition within physical culture, Chow highlights how often the repetitive nature of exercise is interpreted through a Foucauldian lens and narrates fitness as a "form of discipline, surveillance, and ideological interpellation" (2015, 31). In this framework, repetition creates the hardened body with ideology being consistently reinscribed with every additional rep. Chow questions this idea of the hardened body, though, and argues how the need for repetition reveals the "incomplete inscription of ideology upon the site of the body" and instead names that, in this sense, to repeat "[is] closer to 'to rehearse' … for a performance of the modern man in a period of great industrial transformation, but not its actualization … It is possible to see physical culture as both an apparatus that disciplines bodies and produces subjects fit for industry and war, and at the same time an anxious and excessive theatre that challenged precisely this alienation of man from body" (31).

This reframe allows act of physical culture to serve not just a solely disciplinary purpose, but rather an opportunity to engage in an "active, agential, process of (self)-construction" where there is the opportunity to "go off script" (34). Chow concludes with saying that "the seductive nature of physical culture's affective power is such that this mimesis of unalienated labour might in some sense become real; that by playing at self-making we might indeed find a potential for change within the constraints. Within the site of the body, physical and early fitness culture worked out, but did not work through, the anxieties of modernity" (40).

While Chow focuses specifically on Estonian strongman George Hackenschmidt and physical culture as theater in the early twentieth century, he is correct that, to an extent, little has changed in the practice of fitness—as made clear by even how "industry disruptors" like

CrossFit are replicative of fitness culture's origins in America—and we see this "dynamic tension" between desiring the body to be hardened and static and its inherent fallibility or fleshiness be reiterated by bodybuilders of the 1980s and 90s through Alan Klein's work. Within this culture of bodybuilding, Klein argues that men construct a form of masculinity known as "comic book masculinity:"

> "Comic-book masculinity involves securing only the trappings (form) of the hegemonic masculine ideal (not even having to pose, or being wheeled out in a cage so that the sight of you inspires fear), rather than the essence. Throughout this study I have pointed to the absence of functionality in bodybuilding. As a sport, it suffers in comparison to power lifting, which deals with the natural extension of weightlifting. As a statement on hegemonic masculinity, bodybuilding comes up short again because it emphasizes the look of virility rather than demonstration (prowess, aggression, bravery). Like the cartoon representation, at least twice removed from reality (first as mythic, then as children's myth or cartoon), bodybuilding has an exaggerated quality that, ends up raising more questions regarding a range of issues of masculinity than it answers. Bodybuilding fails to convince completely both those who do it, and those who are supposed to be impressed by it. It fails because it is structurally incomplete, lacking a functional component so critical to conventional masculinity. … Like the cartoon without caption, the hypermuscular body, too, is supposed to communicate without an act; its presence is its text. … But the charade is not completely credible. Fussell knew all along that he was really not the savage he so wanted to project to the world, as did the young bodybuilder who wanted to be so powerful-looking as not even to strike a pose. … It seems that too many areas of conventional masculinity impede the bodybuilder's ability to achieve the security he desires" (1990 274-275).

Klein references a story about the named bodybuilder, Fussell, refusing to engage in martial arts in part because it would reveal this inherent tension—if he could not perform strength in the way that matched his aesthetic, the performance would collapse. Klein also suggests that the ethnography he's performed with said bodybuilders shows that bodybuilding could also be a space in which new ideas of masculinity could be created, much like Chow's concept of "going off script" in this same sense. This performance of the body is borne out of the performance of the singular rep that builds into the fitness routine.

In the clips that follow, these ideas of what constitutes tradition, the role of fitness/sport through the framework of the liminal/liminoid, and this idea of not just the body being performed but the exercise as a form of performance itself are both experienced by those interviewed and, at times, called into question. A reoccurring question that is asked, and various implicit and explicit answers are provided, by interviewees is why certain exercises are considered to be exercise, in a formal sense, whereas other forms of work and labor—be that housework, childcare, and so forth—are deemed separate. Ultimately, we see that with white supremacy at its center "traditional fitness" will expand to include various forms of exercise if it results in the performance of the hegemonic body, though this body is inherently fallible by being a body in itself which the inherent need to repeat exercise shows the incomplete nature of inscribing particular values on the body. Rather, repetition becomes rehearsal for this performance. As a result, particular exercises become canonized as long as their repetition can promise the achievement of said performance.

In the interview clips that follow, interviewee's reflections upon their own experiences in fitness, with exercise, and the questions that are raised offer insight into how members of the inclusive fitness community orient towards defining and experiencing exercise, fitness, sport, their relationships, purposes, implications especially in terms of the body, and possibilities.

EXPERIENCES WITH FITNESS & EXERCISE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Defining "Exercise" — Joy Cox

Bri: See, it's really cool to hear that part in there as well.

Joy: Yeah, and I grew up, so I kind of grew up poor and I am saying this because if you've never swept the rug, you- you know, like, don't talk to me about "arm strength" if you've never swept up a rug. But those things are often discounted right at my house. If you have kids and you have loads of laundry that you have to carry from one room to the next. That's work like that- that's

movement. If you live in a two story house and you're running up and down the steps, that- that's movement.
Why don't we count those things? Right, because we would count them if they were in the gym. If it was a medicine ball that you were moving from one room to the next, you would count that. And so it's kind of digging in and getting to some of the foundational issues. Right?

Why does some things count and other things don't? Right. Kind of going back to what you were talking about. Right? Different hierarchies of fitness and and all those things. Like right now I'm participating in- I do chair kickboxing. And I do chair kickboxing with like small weights and resistance bands. And I just want to go on record and say that after a half an hour I'm spent like, you know, people would say, like, "oh, you're sitting down so it doesn't count." Whatever you guys, whatever the resistance band, you can talk to me about these these different things. But it's like, yeah, but it's how we define how we define movement is, you know, it's it's what counts and says who that's philosophical argument, or who counts where the power dynamics are and where those things lie. So yeah.

Experience with Fitness — Asher Freeman

Asher: OK, um. So just what's my expert, who am I and what's my experience?

Bri: Yeah.

AF: OK, so right now I work as a personal trainer. Most of my work is working one-on-one with people, but I do also teach them group fitness classes. And I also do some workshops on like trans wellness. And I'm really into, like, I guess my- my background before becoming a personal trainer was in organizing so really into finding ways to build community within- within the work that I do. And yeah, I was like pretty active as a kid and have been pretty continuously through my life.

However, like most of the movements that I was like really into, like most of the exercise were like really big, like gross body movements, like playing soccer. Well, I mean, I guess if you're really advanced—which I never was, you know—I'm sure there's like more technical points to focus on, but for me, it was like running and kicking and- and I've been like a bike commuter my whole adult life. So I've done a lot of biking and. Yeah. And so I think like what like kind of like I never really thought of what I was doing, like the exercise I was doing. And it's like fitness like and there is never really like a training goal. It was just like very focused on like, you know, something that's fun to me.

So, I did it until I was I don't know, like 24, 25, something like that, and I started like socially transitioning and I was thinking about like going on hormones and- and I also like at that point I hadn't started hormones and I was thinking about using, like weightlifting as a tool to like change my physical appearance and like become more masculine. And so I got into weightlifting. I really- I was very challenged by it at that point, I had a pretty poor proprioception so I had pretty poor understanding of like where my body was in space, which is really true for a lot of trans people.

So, I found it really interesting to spend some time at the gym, just like actually being in my body focused, like focusing on weight lifting. And it's very different than riding a bike because like you actually if you want to, like, avoid injury and build strength, like you need to know like what muscles are working at any given time and be like a lot more aware of your

form. So, I didn't wind up finding that weightlifting did a whole lot to change, like my physical appearance.
But I did notice that it was really useful to me and like building a better relationship with my body and just like getting to spend that like very intentional, slower time going through these movements allowed me to like, do some healing. So, yeah, that was I guess that was even though I was like very into like those very active, that was like my entry point into, like, fitness.

Experience with Fitness — Joy Cox

Transcript

Bri: Like, what were your initial experiences? And feel free to even go into how that's changed over time as well.

Joy: Yeah. So I like to tell people that before it was called exercise or fitness, our parents called it "go outside and play." And so I think that I've always been acclimated or a fan of body movement growing up as a kid, me and my sisters, we danced a lot from that turned into Double Dutch, right. We rode bikes, we did those things.

And then I think as I got older, the emphasis on body movement changed. So I'm a fat black woman. I've been fatall my life, also Black, but you know, this the press to exercise became a thing, right, particularly as I approached my teenage years and then movement just wasn't the same anymore. And so I think I was first introduced into what is typically defined as fitness in my teenage years as a as a way of mitigating the fatness on my body. Right. In the hope to to make it disappear, which was something that I resented. And I think that that resentment just grew stronger as I got older. But I still love to move my body and I still enjoy dancing and I still enjoy doing those types of things. And so fitness for me now is a lot more of participating in activities that that I enjoy, that I that I like to do with the pandemic, being stuck in the house, there's not a whole lot of options as to what could be could be done. But I'm still dancing in my kitchen while I'm cooking dinner or I'm participating on things that I do like YouTube or different things like that, just to make sure that I'm still moving my legs. But yeah, I mean, I think that's kind of how fitness was introduced to me, and that's what fitness is now.

Experience with Fitness — Ilya Parker

Ilya: OK, so my first experiences with fitness was via my childhood, playing sports a little bit here and there, and I was what folks are often referred to, people who are assigned female at birth who have a playful, joyful spirit. They call- they called me a tomboy. And I remember ever started getting out of the age, getting more into like my adolescent years, I was often encouraged not to be as active with my cousin who was who was a guy. We were really, really close. God rest his soul because he actually passed away last year. But we often played together. And then I noticed that I could no longer like, you know, play ball or football or soccer. I had to like I was encouraged to play with dolls more, I was encouraged to wear skirts more. And so I just felt really frustrated at an early age. I was just being stifled to explore in the ways I wanted to. I could no longer go fishing with my grandfather and my cousins. And it was just really I just remember just being I was being sad and pouting in the corner and, like, throwing my doll babies, it was frustrating.

So fast forward, as I got a little older, I just was turned off from fitness. It was one time when I was in junior high, I believe. And I think I was either trying out for basketball or I was playing really good and was encouraged to join the team. And I do remember being like in the weight room and stuff and lifting really, really heavy. And again, just discouraged by the coaches, the girls did this and that, what are you doing? And stop playing around, you're going to injure yourself. And again, it's always been, though, is this notion of you're- you're doing too much, you know, ride your gender lane and just kind of stay there. And so I didn't engage in fitness at all inn my early adulthood years, because I was like ain't got time for that, I already could recognize that gyms were intimidating to me.

I just didn't feel like I had a place as someone who was already masculine-presenting. I didn't quite know where I was with my gender, but I just knew what I how I wanted to live and how I wanted to move. And so when I decided to engage in gender transition and then I was met with a lot of fatphobia, medicalized fatphobia, medical gatekeeping, and I was encouraged by my physician at that time to lose X amount of pounds. And instead of taking the diet pills that they were trying to prescribe me, I just was like, you know what? Let me join a gym, let me hire a trainer. And of course, was still met with transphobia, homophobia, especially living in the rural south, there just wasn't a lot of coaches who were used to someone like me who was pretty vocal about what I wanted to do as far as fitness goals. I was explicitly clear, like, hey, I am beginning testosterone therapy, I'm transgender. I like to modify my body to a more masculinized appearance. These are some of the exercises I want to work on. This is what I want to do. And, you know, on a side note, I already was developing like a love for, like, anatomy being a physical therapist assistant. I was in school, so I was learning a lot about the body. And so I kind of already had was growing more knowledge than the average trainer that I was engaging with. And so I'm like wait a minute, that's not what I learned in PTA school. So, you know, and so I was questioning folks and I'm like in this actually doesn't even feel right in my body.

You're telling me to move this particular way and it's not making room for my belly. This is not functional to me. I know that's what form looks like for you, but that's not what form looks like for me and feels like for me in this body. And so, you know, more and more as I just grew very frustrated and and often felt unsafe with coaches, I just was like, you know what, I can do this on my own. And that's just what I decided to do. I started training myself. And so I eventually was able to start taking testosterone, training myself, and then my trans masculine friends recognized the work that I was putting in and saw the changes in my body. And they were like, "Hey, can you coach me?" Started doing that. And then I had like I was rotating in any given day five to ten people coach and pretty much stayed at the gym all day. And like 90 percent of the people that I was coaching at the time, I was coaching for free, I just lived in the gym and then I had like five or six different gym memberships all over town. And just jump from gym to gym to meet people, meet people in fields, parks, at their home parking lots and at the mall, just train anywhere that I could. And then I started putting free boot camps out and then I fell okay enough and then I started, so you have free bootcamps, did a few churches, was hosting bootcamps. And then I started feeling a little bit more compelled to, like, share about it on social media. And I was like, hey, you know what? I'm you know, I kind of got this lane working with trans masculine people specifically, but it started blossoming out to LGBT community as a whole and started blossoming into larger bodies.

And so I started sharing about it on social media. And of course, I was met with a lot of confusion. You know, they people were like, "What the hell are you talking about? And people- and it's interesting, people back then when I was in carving lanes for- for diverse bodies, people

were like, but, “Hey, fitness is for all bodies.” That’s the most common comment I received back then, which which honestly prompted me to create that hashtag fitness for all bodies. And I was like, yeah, no fitness for our bodies, but we know the ones that are typically negated. And I started using that language like I’m here to carve space for those in vulnerable populations and then, you know, started kind of taking steam and, at that time, my business was named Forseca Fitness in honor of my late friend who passed away of lung cancer. And so, you know, I said that I would create my business in his memory and then I decided to make t shirts and one of my t shirts was going to be the logo of Decolonizing Fitness. And so I didn’t quite have a profile pic at that time and so I’ve literally just put up one of my graphics of the t shirt designs on my Facebook page and that she took off and then people were like, “Oh my God, the rebranding is amazing. Wow. What do you do again? Oh my God. This is just the most amazing thing.” And then just like from there and Decolonizing Fitness really was birth. And that’s why I say a lot of my work was birthed by the people because I put out a lot of asks early on, like, hey, what would you like to see if fitness felt supportive for you? What are some things missing in your area regarding fitness? And- and then it just started growing and I started speaking about it and sharing about it and sharing my work. The one thing the one unfortunate thing that did happen is, as is my business continued to grow, it removed me away from the people that I actually sought out to train and still wish to really work with which is trans masculine people, in particular Black, Brown, Indigenous, trans masculine folks. Because I feel like that subculture within the trans community, really… has a difficult way when it comes to the way I think we’re really coerced into fitness because we’re told that the effects of testosterone are so extreme and you need to make use of it and you need to hit the gym.

And, of course, when we when we move in- in a patriarchal society, in the way manhood is positioned, in the way masculinity should be viewed on our body, it just- it just comes with a lot. And I just don’t feel like we get a lot of room because oftentimes we when we choose to medically transition especially, it’s just- it’s just this lane that a lot of us have to ride and many of us don’t want to. I don’t even really want to be cis-assumed, binary-based trans masculine person, and I was really forced into that through a lot of that through toxic fitness, because I went on YouTube and all the trans man on YouTube were white cis-passing, access to resources, access to camera equipment, and they were telling me what trans should look like. What trans manhood should look like. And there’s no room for any type of variance in diversity within our gender expansiveness within the trans masculine realm. And so I do want to go and I’m trying to be intentional now with getting back to my roots. And so that’s why I developed a trans masculine series in particular to help support folks along their fitness and movement journeys.

Experience with Fitness — Courtney Marshall

Courtney: I mean I grew up in Newark, New Jersey, so I grew up in a city we weren’t really allowed to go outside because it just wasn’t safe in our neighborhood. We did have a park across the street, but it was a place where, again, you couldn’t really go by yourself. We didn’t really- we had, you know, I had friends who lived in our apartment buildings, like the apartment building was kind of a playground, I guess for lack of- we didn’t have a lot of access to outdoor space because it requires supervision. And I grew up my grandmother raised me and my siblings, and there just weren’t enough people to watch us. So little kids, like, I don’t have any memories of like riding a bike and doing all that. Like that didn’t happen.

I got a bike in seventh grade and I remember I fell and I had sprained my ankle and I think I didn't get on a bike again until I was in graduate school. I was in Los Angeles and I remember getting a bike and I rode a few times. I actually still have it. I hooked it up to an indoor trainer. It's there and I, I, I put on like a YouTube videos of like bike rides and so that's fun to do. So- so I didn't so but I had gym class, you know, the usual kind of school with like a big playground, but they didn't really teach us games, they just kind of put you outside, and figure it out, and there weren't many supplies we have like a jump rope and people play basketball. But that's more what the boys did, the girls kind of stood around and did what we would do, like steps in, like hand games and stuff. So that was my conception of anything related to any kind of like P.E. or like outdoor physical stuff.

In high school, our gym was the YMCA, so our high school didn't have a gym. So, we walk across the street to the Y to go to the gym. I hated gym class because they will always make us like run things just like, oh God. Like but again, it wasn't it was a really under-resourced school. When I look back on it, I realize how under-resourced it was. And, so, I didn't have experiences of, you know, people really being creative with games. And it just wasn't my experience. So, I hated fitness. Anything having to do exercise. I just really wasn't interested in it. And then I got to Los Angeles and like everybody went to the gym. This was in graduate school. So I was like, I guess I'm going to the gym, too. So I went to a few gyms. I remember having a trainer "Rod the Bod." And it was a- I don't remember. It was a chain gym. It was in Hollywood. I don't know how I found this man. But anyway, I remember I signed up for like a few sessions with him and like, I remember the first one just going home, being so sore. And I just I remember going I remember going home and having to take a nap. And in fact, one of my kind of big fitness, I don't know, milestones, so to speak, was being able to exercise and go home and not have to take a nap. Then I remember like meeting him outside we like in Hollywood, they just got really weird. I was like, I don't need this anymore. So that was the end of that. And I think I might have had some friends. We might have went like walking around like I used to live near Santa Monica College. Maybe you went to Santa Monica College, like walked around campus and that was it, and then I saw I did nothing like I did, I did I hate I never wanted to do anything, but I had like a gym membership and I would go.

But it was just weird because it was like dating and it was L.A. and L.A. is just anyway and just- I just really wasn't interested in it. So then when I moved back to New Hampshire, I finished my I finished school, I came back here, I was assistant professor at the University of New Hampshire, and this is probably the story that you that I talk about what is going to the Beyonce concert. And I accidentally ending up in the front row and like, how do I end up here? And just watching her just dance and sing and being that cool. And I was and I and I always and it's on my Facebook thing, it says "I'm getting back into the gym like real talk LOL," right Then I came back and I went to the gym. So we had our insurance paid for this gym that I never went to. And- but I went I signed up because I was like, well, it's a benefit, so I'm a sign up. Right? I went and I started in aquafit like this, water aerobics classes and I really liked it. Like I wasn't like stressed out. And it was fun. It was different. There were these really funny, like old people in it. And I loved, loved being with them. And then I saw on the schedule they had this Aqua Zumba class and I was like, well, this is says "aqua," so I went because it said "aqua" and it's O, it looks like something fun.

And I, I just fell in love, like immediately. Like, I was like, oh my God, this is because the other classes had like fifties music and you would do like, you know, eight of these and eight kicks. But, because Zumba is- the moves are connected to the music, it's just like connected with

me. And I've been a Zumba. If there is like a "super fan" like I am, I *adore,* I do like it when people say they don't like, I'm like, how do you not like Zumba? Like, it's so much fun! Like, what do you mean?!

So from there, that's when I really got excited about going to class and that was a big thing. Like it wasn't like oh God. I remember like dreading, like oh God, it's an hour to a class. I guess I also was L.A. because you got six hours to get anywhere, right? Oh, I was dreading it, but I started to look forward to it. And that's the thing that still is exciting to me about Zumba, is that I look forward to it like every single class, like I just taught a class. If somebody told me right now, like so-and-so is have, I'm like, "All right, let me put on my shoes, let's go!" And so I went to that and then I saw there was a Zumba class, which I saw was like for old people. So I already loved old people anyway. So I was like, oh, I want to go hang out. So I- and that was hilarious. We had so much fun and it wasn't a lot of jumping. It was nice and gentle. And from there I went to Zumba and just kept going. And then I had a teacher, and this was maybe a few years later, I was going to her classes all the time and she was going out of town for something. And I think I mentioned something like, oh, I can, like, substitute the class if you want me to—and this was this was a Zumba, this was a hip hop cardio class. She was like, OK, so she's so I think about it now. And I'm just like, oh my God, I've routines I came up with. She said, OK, well, show me two songs and then we'll meet again and she'll be two more so that and I actually I still have pictures from the first class I taught way back and who knows, that's on Facebook too. And it was fun and it was just a whole bunch of stuff.

OK, like I can teach this, like this is not that difficult. And then I decided to go and get licensed in it and I was like, OK, like, this can be fun. And and I know in the podcast that I talk about, like being in the back row of the class and how I really want to have fun. And that's when I got into teaching. And then I said, well, what else can I teach? And so I wanted to really learn a lot. And I always had this idea of really making the classes accessible, financially accessible, as physically accessible as I could. And so I wanted to always cater to folks who felt like the gym wasn't a good place, like it wasn't a happy place. So, everybody who had had those experiences that I had had, I wanted to do something about making that experience better for them. And- and to this day, I say, whether you stick with my class or not, because I don't care. Like I tell people, you can come for five minutes. You can come to every class, like I've never charge you. You're never going to get a "Where is everybody? Oh, it's January, y'all need to be in class."

Like, I, I don't do that because I was reading some of this morning about this app and they were talking about like the type of message they want to send, but also the type of people they want to attract. Like I don't want to attract the let me get down the pounds for a wedding. Like, I just I don't do well with that energy. And so I choose not to kind of put those people at the center of what I do. So then I kind of figured out social media. And so I started out and it really was just me just taking random pictures of me, like at the gym or after the gym. And I would just wear all these shirts. I this is really funny. So this group, they misspell Zora Neale Hurston middle name. They're supposed to be. But the shirt is so cute that I called the person. I was like, "Can I get a new shirt?" If she was like she was, "I'm so sorry that we misspelled and she's like all these people looked at it and like everybody," it's all right. That's OK. It's fun. So it really was just me kind of just posting just like let me pictures like here's me at the gym and here's me doing playing in my basement. And people liked it. And I was like, oh, you like this? And so then my friends would be like, "Oh, I want to exercise too. "So then we would just kind of do things like that. So since and I haven't done this much recently and I've been thinking I

want to go back to really being on social media like that, but I think that the landscape has so changed since I- I feel old saying that.

Bri: Oh yeah, I agree. Yeah.

CM: I mean, I feel like old, in the I don't know, in the social media. Because when I was doing it and again, I can go back and look at the dates, this is like I came to Exeter probably 2016? So I'm probably thinking like 2013, 2014? I know 2015 is when I did all my Spartan races and so probably like 2013-2015 was kind of what I was really kind of being funny on the Internet. But now so much of it is like being an influencer and you can't just say like I can't just say, "Oh here, here's me going for a walk and I listen to my zombie run 5k," right? Everything's turned into like, what can you sell? And I will put stuff like even I put stuff on Instagram and people like, oh, we want to contact you about our brand or we and I'm like, I don't- that was never what I wanted to be wanted it to be about. But then like, I feel like people who who do post exercise stuff or fitness stuff, now all of a sudden they're selling meal plans and workout plans. And I'm like, I'm not interested in that. So I don't know like that, not that I care about a particular market, but it just I don't like that type of attention. So I don't know if I would just be opening myself up to more like I also hear people, different people talk about, like how they get mean comments and stuff. And I'm like look, this is just some laughs. Just me like doing this, you know, for some jokes. Right. This is not about me trying to put myself in some kind of position or be like, you know, invited someplace to speak. It's not that. So that to me, I don't that's what I when I said before, it like capitalism has, I think really changed or social media has changed. Yeah, I share I think about sharing fitness.

Experience with Fitness — Beck Beverage

Bri: And so I know that I already know some of this, but maybe you want to go into certain details or characterize it slightly differently, is hearing about your entrance into fitness, what your values were then, if you want to you can go through the timeline of how that has changed and what changed it, feel free to take it in a direction that feels organic to you.

Beck: OK, so like how just how I got into fitness. OK, yeah, I got into fitness originally. This is going to sound so much like the answer I just gave. I got into fitness eight or nine years ago. And like I said the other day, because I- I hated myself and I hated my body and I thought that- that- that changing my body, somehow getting more muscular, getting a six pack, that sort of thing would be- what would make me feel better about myself and fit in better with other people, like it would close the gap that I felt between me and the outside world.

And so I… tried to find a place where I could work out and was turned away from a few gyms here in Portland, and it's so interesting how fast things change, because now, like, I could walk into almost any gym in town and it was like, I feel old because that doesn't feel very long ago, like very long ago and so anyway, so when I met Luke, who was the owner of [Sweet Momentum Fitness] and happened to also be a trans guy, which I thought was really cool and really interesting, and I started training with him like just like personal training sort of deal. And then eventually I was finishing up my bachelor's degree at the time and decided that I would also like to become a trainer. And he offered me sort of like a job in kind of a mentorship sort of deal. And yeah, when I started training, it was- it was a very by the book sort of fitness space, like we

had like fitness business coaches that we worked with who were kind of giving us, like, this ABC model for like how to run a gym, how to advertise the gym, that sort of thing. And it was it all revolved around weight loss challenges, running these 21 day, like you've heard the whole.

BMS: As it does, it's always this 21 day, why is it always! [laughter].

BB: And then throughout the whole 21 day process you are- it's a sales job really like you're selling the, the next step of the program and, um, and the whole time I was doing that, like I really hated the sales aspect of the job and it felt like- I just want to be moving with people and having these really personal, like, interactions with people and- and yet I was like spending most of my free time learning how to be a better salesperson.

And- and then like I was talking about the other day, the the the weight loss stuff and just noticing the way that that- that that impacted the people that I was working with. So- so there's like that side of it and then there are a few things happened, one is like I like I said the other day, I had this conversation with one of my clients who was trying to lose weight, had stopped losing weight after a couple of years of us working together and she, she really broke down with me in conversation, and I didn't have any any advice for her, like I didn't know why she wasn't losing weight, like we had sort of exhausted all of the things that I just realized that yeah, this was like a really fucked up thing to be doing. So that happened and around that time as well, in my own training, I at that point I was doing like all of the right things, like with big air quotes, like I was I had a nutritionist that I was seeing. I was lifting weights all the times during the week that you need to like I was doing all the things and I just felt I was feeling physically worse and worse in my body.

I- and finally, like, I was getting just like weird pain and and little tiny injuries. And finally I got a shoulder injury that and was told by a doctor at the time that I should never lift my arms over my head again. And that was really kind of the last- the last straw in terms of the way that I was training. And I around that time, again, I also went to a kettle- I went to a kettlebell certification, a StrongFirst kettlebell certification. And I had this moment where. We were doing something and I felt extremely awkward. There were like 100 people there, 20 trainers walking around and I was doing something. I never picked up a kettlebell before. I was doing something incorrectly. And I had a first one trainer come over and started yelling the same cue at me over and over and over again. And I wasn't getting it and I didn't like when I don't get it, and it just gets worse and worse. And then eventually I had like five trainers around me. Yes, yes.

And it was something like the mix of those experiences. I had to take a step back and be like, what am I doing? This- this doesn't feel good anymore. What is the point of doing all of this? And- and that was sort of the entry into the the style of training that I have been doing now, and that really started with just like this inkling around… there's a relationship between trauma, and the body, and movement, and I didn't know what it was, and I was working with all of these people for whom it's pretty similar ideas, like you would give all of the same squat cues that you hear in the video. And the squats just didn't happen the same way. It's like, what is it about? About the people that I happen to already be working with and and my own experience in my body. And then I just went down this this rabbit hole, and that's like the last six years or so. I'm just trying to sort of figure out what the connections are. And how do you work with people who are severely disassociated from their bodies, people who have complex trauma, PTSD, severe layers of autoimmune conditions and other medical diagnoses? With the kind of dual goals, one of like figuring out my own stuff and my own relating to my body a little bit a little bit better,

and also trying to figure out how to use movement as a tool to help bring the people in my community and our communities back to their bodies. Like because it's not squats and deadlifts, you know, it's something something else needs to happen that's not currently happening-happening.

Experience with Fitness — Lore McSpadden

Lore: The original history of it, like for many folks, was shame and obligation and performance based and mixed in with, you know, some disordered eating and eating disorder bullshit and which is, I guess, a dismissive way to refer to a very real problem. But like, that's how I mean. And then, you know, the all or nothing thinking that's attached to that, you know, led to many years of. Very sporadic exercise that. You know, trying to. Navigate. Body shame and gender dysphoria and sizeism through movement in a very strict and stringent and demanding way, and then when I inevitably failed to live up to these shame-based standards, not moving for quite a while in any intentional way.

And then. It was actually- I reached I had a point in my life where actually a lot of loved ones passed away in a very short period of time and, it's in very different ways, like there was not like similar causes or conditions, but part of my own path of healing during that time, like healing, coexisting with grieving, provided a lot of clarity and I really intentionally set upon living more intentionally and started making like one change at a time to move me towards greater flourishing and maybe like the third or fourth item on that list, because I would like change one thing and then when that felt like the way. My life was like, what needs to change next, move me towards flourishing, right, instead of, like, trying to change everything and then, of course, nothing lasts. And one of the items on that list was like finding a way of movement that I didn't hate. Right. Like what? Like ones that I like, I like actually enjoy doing. And at the time, I did not expect to be good at any. I did not expect to change my career.

I didn't expect to like let alone like love movement and this path. I just started exploring different ways of moving to see if I could find ones that had elements of playfulness and empowerment and enjoyment, and that like path took me towards, you know, learning kettlebells and learning about barbell movements and getting involved in competitive powerlifting and then like me being like movement and anatomy and physiology became like a special interest that I just grabbed onto and dove into and learned everything I could about and to explore, like I approached movement and learning about movement with a great deal of curiosity, like it became this like exploration and adventure. And then it was a couple years into that where, you know, I had this "Aha!" moment or moment of clarity where I was like, I've now gone several years of moving joyfully and sustainably and I've like discovered a relationship to my body that is empowering and that isn't connected to shame or obligation, and this might be a gift I have to offer, and it might particularly be a gift I have to offer to people who have not ever experienced that before, like not only who've never experienced it before, but who have never.

Had the opportunity to believe that it could be possible, right, and I love learning about it and talking about it and discovering it and sharing it, and maybe this is that burning point of my life. Maybe this is the work I have to offer the world in service, particularly to I mean, I think that helping folks who have been… who have faced marginalization, who have faced systemic discrimination and violence and all of the ways that that impacts our capacity to flourish and is it's I truly believe that, like the physical is political and like that, helping folks get strong and like who we help and how we help could have a very profound impact on, not just that person, but on

the energy that there exist that exists within a community that can then be directed in any number of radical and revolutionary ways. And so I dove into it and I poured everything I had in terms of time, money and energy to learning from some leaders in the field, including many who absolutely were not accessible, like many who, you know, prided themselves on the elite and exceptional.

And like like I I was mentored by people who like I don't. Put their names or companies or gyms down when I like, speak of them, because their values are so different than mine, but what I kind of did for a couple of years was put on my armor, hide who I was, and go and get this information with the intention of then reframing it and using it in ways that connected to empowerment and political revolution and yeah, I don't know.

Aesthetic & Function in Fitness — Ilya Parker

Ilya: I do. And I agree with that, especially being in a therapy where I absolutely agree about moving away from just- just aesthetic-based in general. I do think when we talk about function now, it is leaning more to like a healthist type of, you know what I mean? So, I still bring nuance with the way we talk about, oh, no, I'm about functioning, about just looking at me, just looking good, because that leaves a lot of people out, too, who just don't even want to move their body or they want to move their body and it might not even be in a functional way to them or to us, you know, because then they also function is- is in the realm of a lot of the textbook "and this is the way form should look. This is the way the functions" you I mean, and I get some stuff just biomechanically the body moves in a certain way, but it just me in a larger body, I know my function because I, for example, I put up a sit to stand video that just got bombed with trolls on YouTube and it's functional for me. Number one, it was just helping people get up off the floor without having anything to push up on in a larger body, who also is tight in certain areas, and has muscle imbalances in certain areas because your- your client is coming to you that way, you're not going to be able to fix all of that shit overnight. And it's not your goal to fix it or correct it. That's to me, that's a lot of healthist stuff where you instantly think, "OK, I'm going to alleviate, fix this back pain," I get where it's coming from, I get the intentionality behind it. But my function from that to stand look hella fucked up, right? It didn't look functional at all, you know what I mean? Because I had to make room for my belly, my ankles, my- my ankle mobility sucks, well I ain't going to say sucks, was lacking, my knees were, you see what I mean? So, yeah, well, we really interrogate like what are we saying when we talking about function? It's just like similar to folks in larger bodies who are like, "well, I'm fat, but I'm healthy." Let me prove to you how healthy I am. Yeah, let me. You see what I mean? And also the other piece is, what if if I don't I I'm getting away from. Well, I'm bringing a little bit more reflection into the aesthetic side, especially when it comes to trans masc or trans folks because of the trans machine that we're under with aesthetically look at a certain way. I leave room for body modifications. You say to me, because, yes, it I have trained several trans people who are specifically wanting to work out for aesthetic based stuff. Yes. Do I add enough stuff to function that this that all the benefits of exercising that go beyond. Absolutely. But they're coming to me and that's their goal. And if someone is coming to me and their goal is to like broaden their shoulders or whatever, I'm going to help them do that. And there's nothing wrong with that. If I really have done my work in making sure I'm showing up and trying as best I can to remove those toxic pieces out of fitness, I also don't want to sweep up someone who is very vulnerable coming to me and being like, oh, well, we just working on function over here? Yeah, that's to

say, and I know a lot of people don't agree with that, but that's just something I feel like we kind of need to push on a little bit when it comes to function versus aesthetics, because it's just not that is not that binary to me. Yeah, you know, it's almost stigmatizing one and uplifting the other without really still bringing the uniqueness of each person. That's the that's the key, the uniqueness of your that particular client and what they need.

The "Strong Black Woman" and Fitness — Courtney Marshall

Courtney: Like, all the women are white, but all all the women are white, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave. And I was again thinking about how, you know, cardio belongs to white women, strength belongs to white men. So what about everybody? But what about everybody else? Like, why don't we get- and I guess just thinking about the stereotype of the "strong Black woman," right? And like but they're not- but alongside, like news articles about like the obesity epidemic, women don't exercise because they're worried about their hair. And- and I so even when I think back to my own childhood and I think about the people who didn't have cars. Right? Who walked to the bus stop. So, people were still moving, but it wasn't seen as *exercising*. It wasn't fitness. Like that was something you like stop, and I'm going to put on my special shoes and I'm going to run and I'm going to come back and I'm going to buy a water bottle. Right? So, I'm trying to figure that out. Like, how does that that stereotype of Black women's strength? Right? Which comes out of like these histories of enslavement.

Right, so there's I used to write about prison all the time. That was my dissertation was about prison. But like I think like Sarah Haley's work about the chain gang and, you know, the know women were put on the chain gangs, too, and women were doing the same, like Black women were doing the same work. But somehow fitness didn't include always it always includes those that we say we're defining ourselves again, right? But I'm trying to figure out, like, how that happened and maybe what- what are the current day ramifications of it that don't get better. That don't fall into this like "Black women need to exercise because they're fat." Right?

Well, that's always the line that I'm walking. I was talking to Melissa Toler about this podcast, about how, you know, and I wrote to her and I was like, this is why I can't be an influencer, because you can either be I can either care about, like, fat people or I care about Black people. I can't do both. Right. So if I'm in a group of like I want to get together with other like Black fitness people, teachers and stuff, I have to toe like the diet line. Like and if I want to be in the body positivity, which is what it used to be. Right? The body positivity, I can be there and I can say, well, "You don't want to listen to Black people!" OK, I can do that. Or I can do you know, I can't do. Why do you have to choose a struggle so that's that's kind of what I'm looking at, but now it's kind of moved and shifted and I don't know what it is anymore because I then I moved from there to thinking about food and Black food and what that connection was to movement, because that was a part of the kind of mammy then it went from like the strong Black woman stereotypes like the mammy stereotype and like she's fat and she's dark, but she works hard, what's she eating? So it was just so I really don't know where it is right now…

Bri: No, I can't wait to read it!

CM: It's all over the place and I'm a teacher, so who has to write this book trying to get my students to be better people! To love each other and be good to themselves.

SUMMARY

How is “exercise” defined and decided beyond its most literal definition? What are different people’s experiences with exercise, fitness, and movement, especially given that they are involved in a movement that seeks to both preserve parts of fitness while completely deconstructing and dismantling other pieces of it? In sharing what their experiences with fitness and exercise were and are, it is interesting to see whether someone started the timeline during childhood or marked their entrance into fitness as participating in what is considered more “traditional” forms of exercise such as entering the gym. This immediately identifies the tension that a number of participants name around what is considered exercise, fitness, and movement. Courtney Marshall, for example, explicitly asks why is it that exercising is always seen as something you must purchase things, like water bottles or running shoes, for and not walking to the bus stop or as Joy Cox suggests sweeping a rug?

In this same vein, Joy Cox, Asher Freeman, and Ilya Parker all identify movement or exercise as something that was playful and joyful to begin with where movement was a way to experience being in their bodies in an enjoyable way or being in the company of others. For Courtney Marshall, Lore McSpadden, and Beck Beverage, they all name this joy, but as something that is arrived at later rather than something they experienced early on seek to re-cultivate. Regardless of when these experiences are had within their individual lineages, this distinction between shameful movement or exercise happening out of pressure or obligation—especially in regards to the pressure to lose weight—is contrasted with words such as “joyful,” “sustainable,” “empowerment,” and this idea of returning or reconnecting with the body after being separated from it.

Another piece I want to highlight from all of these interviews are the variety of movements named as exercise: Aqua Zumba, kettlebells, barbells, weightlifting, dancing, chair kickboxing, biking, running, soccer, fishing even, but also walking to the bus stop, childcare, and sweeping a rug. The later activities, though, are suggested as "actually" being exercise, but not being included in this idea of "canon" as it comes to exercise. That instead, to exercise you first most engage in the performance of getting ready to exercise by getting into certain clothes specifically labelled as being for exercise, having a water bottle, and other equipment.

This idea of "canon" is extended to bodies, as well, especially in regards to strength. Courtney asks how it is possible that there is the stereotype of the "strong Black woman," borne out of the legacy of slavery and with Black women working on chain gangs, yet Black women are always told to exercise more because they need to lose weight and aren't seen as "fit." Similarly, Beck asks questions that imply that bodies experiencing illness, trauma, or other similar experiences are not wholly included in this idea of "fitness" either. Ilya introduces this frame in discussing trans fitness specifically, and even Asher alludes to this slightly through how fitness is pursued with the intention of masculinizing the body, in how trans masc and trans men on YouTube present a specific idea of not just what trans masculinity acts like, but looks like through the body. While this affirms Farber's work along the lines of presenting fitness as a potential "trans practice," it also introduces critique around what the boundaries are constructed around body image, presentation, and the consequences trans individuals face who inherently can't adhere to those presented standards due to race, class, body size, ability, and more. This is especially because these standards are often presented with a specific idea of what "transness" should like look, which is often through the lens of requiring trans men or trans masc individuals to aspire towards being cis passing, as Ilya names.

Finally, and perhaps one of the most illuminating pieces out of these clips, is how inclusive fitness seems to step into a space of "unknowing." A central component to the criticism of "traditional" fitness is that it is prescriptive, is centered around producing the standardized body, and creates institutions like CrossFit and SoulCycle that offer one-size-fits-all approaches to various and diverse experiences. Everyone who is featured in this section introduces a different perspective on this movement away from prescriptive, overarching, and institutional approaches towards an unlearning and unknowing and rather moving towards curiosity. Joy decides for herself what counts in terms of exercise, and alongside Courtney asks why certain types of body movement don't "count." Asher speaks on their journey through fitness from focusing solely on producing a particular body image, towards healing and connecting with the body. Beck asks about where particular bodies fit into fitness, especially sick and traumatized bodies. Lore explicitly names curiosity as being one of the driving elements of their journey from more "traditional" fitness experiences towards other understandings of fitness. In particular I want to highlight Ilya's commentary to the question I ask about the relationship between aesthetic and function.

I had asked this question based on the writing of Klein and how he writes on the distinction between the aesthetic sought after by the bodybuilder in contrast to the function of the powerlifter—was the key to inclusive fitness needing to move away from aesthetic and rather focus on function? Ilya's response revealed that this is a false dichotomy and that even solely focusing on function introduces healthism and recreates this idea of standardization of both the body and the process of exercise itself. Rather, they suggest that there is a necessity in acknowledging why people aspire towards certain aesthetics and to not remove agency from them in terms of what they want to use exercise for. Similarly, focusing solely on function

reintroduces the idea of trying to standardize or rehabilitate the motions of the body, which inherently replicates ableism, fatphobia, and so forth. Instead, Ilya suggests fitness professionals focus on the uniqueness of the client and doing their own internal work to not reiterate the institutional issues of fitness through interpersonal interaction.

This movement towards "unknowing" is reflected in everyone interviewed talking about how they found a type of movement that worked for them, but that that did not need to be the end all be all for other people. Similarly, there is an acknowledgement that maybe the type of exercise they engage in is not available for others to engage in. While this is another essay for another time, this reflects similarly to how carceral settings as they are currently conceived in America similarly offer singular solutions (such as imprisonment) for multivariate problems. For abolitionists, the solution does not mean creating another singular solution by just another name, but eroding at the idea of these solutions and even questioning the nature of "solution" in the first place (Ben-Moshe 2020). For the gym, weight loss is clearly painted as one of the singular, overarching singular solutions to clearly multivariate experiences and needs with the goal of the productive, standardized body. As Joy reflects on her experience with even just dancing in the kitchen, the question is raised whether or not goals are even needed for a movement to be considered exercise.

REFLECTIONS WITH JUSTICE WILLIAMS

Transcript from Video Interview

Bri: The second section of, um, again like people's interviews and such is talking about the actual experience with fitness and exercise, like, going beyond- thinking about again like fitness as this, like, overarching industry, an overarching system, but how that plays into the actual act of, you know, movement and exercising itself and, um, a number of the conversations brought up amongst folks who were speaking to this, um, there's a couple of really interesting conversations that were brought up where, um, you know some people it was interesting to see when I asked folks, you know, like "What was your experience with exercise?" to see where that answer

started. You know, for some folks, that started when they were playing as kids and, you know, defining that as, uh, kind of the way they started moving, um, an da lot of them described, you know, enjoying playing as a kid running into, you know, issues of identity around movement whether that, you know, being a woman, um, you know, being Black and so forth, and how that shaped their experience later on in life or even at the beginning, um, and then moving towards, you know, this new idea, um, or that maybe more of like a new vision of fitness in order to reclaim that playfulness that came with them as a child and then other folks talked about entering, um, fitness and starting to exercise from a more like, um, entering it more as like an adult, um, specifically wanting to work out, you know, a lot of people's experiences across the board centered around weight loss as being their first entrance into exercise, um, but then all that.

Justice: I think when I think about like exercise for my body, I think about, um, organizational sport, I think about, um, in the ways that my body has been viewed to and- and really project it out in the world the way, I've internalized my body to be an element of entertainment and element of, um, creating capital even if I get a small percentage of that capital, creating capital for white supremacist culture, right? And so that is a drive, the embodiment is embodied within my body as a Black man and in the way that I reflect my maleness, right? And so, what do I mean by that in the ways it's a social construct around my body that movement is really attached in sport and fitness to white supremacy and in the ways, right, masculinity is viewed as hyper aggressive, masculinity is viewed as this warriorship or this warriorhood.

This- this- these ideas that have been really like- like, again, we're going to talk about these social constructs but it's edged so deep, I think about conversations of, in the ways that I've relearned practice and movement from Roc. And we'll go back and forth and I love the way Roc of Rooted Resistance really embodies this wisdom around the depth of the ways that we articulate ourselves within the fitness industry so the depth of the history, right, the depth of the toxin, right, and where these ideas generally come from. I think about talking to them about Greece and Romans like during that time of, um, that otherness but really trying to bring ourselves like these ideas are really deep within the fitness industry bring ourselves closer to beauty, white gods, right, these god- god-like strength and power, god-like mortality, god-like, like making everything else "other." The demonization of women's body- bodies, right. But not only the demonization but the claim that women belong to men. Adam and Eve, right? And I take this into connection.

Why am I saying all these things, right? I'm saying all these things because I embody it, right? And I embody it in ways that I identify, that I've internalized. Masculinity, I identify that I- I internalize my identity as a Black person and Black individual, and also my identity as a trans individual, right? And so my trans body never had space for fitness, my inability to tap into fitness in ways that felt good for my body, no translation, but as a Black individual of masculine identity, only seeing basketball players, football players, this organization of where I'm gonna end up if I'm successful in life because if I'm not successful, I end up in prison.

Again, more than slavery and productivity toward whiteness and white supremacist culture so still using my body, right? So I hope that that helps you to understand in the ways that I've been lied to about what fitness means and the bodies that have been drilled into my very mind that are "normal bodies" that I fall far from each day, right? So that's not a part of my fitness, my movement, right. So true fitness to me came to me later on. When I realized all of who I am and wanted to celebrate that.

This to me became a different ideas, it became no longer a cookie cutter model because that doesn't work. It actually became a voice form the voiceless, the erased whose bodies that need to be illuminated it became activism for me, it became a way to etch out our true authentic selves and- and really shed toxic white ideas that we've inhaled as norms for very long in a way, in any within any institution. So within education, science, again, we go to those intellectual minds that really have uh- like intellect on lock, like really do and we don't even see that, right? Because we're in 2021 and we see authors of all shapes, sizes, colors, right, right, but we don't trace back to the root of our intellectual society and how that was framed to maintain white supremacy hetero- that cis heteropatriarchal capitalist society and we- we have to understand that they are not separate, they are interlocking and remain a same source, right, can't separate they need each other to thrive, right?

LABOR: EXPLOITATION & PRECARITY

I have worked in the fitness industry since the age of sixteen teaching group fitness classes, yoga classes, working the front desk for boutique studios, and even working an assistant studio manager. Having worked at nearly ten different studios—often simultaneously—over the course of eight years, I have experienced both a wide variety of labor practices, but few based on long-term investment or care for employees. Many studios and gyms I have worked at misuse the filing status of independent contractor, which requires employees to pay a significant higher rate in taxes, while still treating them like hourly employees. I have worked at a studio that required employees to pay for and attend a minimum number of classes each month or face a pay cut. This same studio and others would pay instructors per student (also known as per head) while giving especially new instructors impossible times to fill like 3 PM on a Wednesday or 7:45 PM on a Sunday while making it your responsibility to "build a following" if you were going to get better class times. I have experienced sexual harassment and watched others face the same with no consequence to the perpetuator. I watched people be written off the schedule without any formal firing or exit process. This list only expands when looking at work experiences through the lens of identity.

In many ways, these experiences in the fitness industry are indiscernible from other forms of customer service work, especially in the United States. Rather, it is the same mistreatment of employees but simply put in spandex and in front of a gym mirror. That being said, there are also

a few unique points that would only be able to happen because of the nature of gyms and studios simply as a format. For example, your own body being treated as a product of your "expertise" in addition to being used for the physical labor of teaching a class or working the front desk. Additionally, the nature of work in fitness in particularly defined by labor precarity, a term used to describe non-standard or temporary work that makes financial stability a near impossibility whether due to low pay, job insecurity, or unprotected work (Fudge & Owens 2006).

In fitness, precarity exists through the constant tension of needing to teach a significant number of classes in order to be a fitness instructor full-time. This also is nearly impossible to accomplish while working at one gym or studio because of the nature of class schedules. Studios prioritize having numerous instructors on staff to provide variety to their clients, while keeping you on the schedule just enough so it works for their clients' schedules if they want to take your class semi-regularly. Yet, this may mean you can only teach three to four classes per week at one studio. Additionally, some studios implement the use of "non-competes" preventing their clientele from feasibly following you to any other locations you teach at. Some of these non-compete forms may prevent you from working at any other location, instead requiring all of your classes be taught at that single studio, meaning you need to either pick up front desk hours or find another job that can somehow accommodate for the often sporadic teaching schedules produced by the studio you are working at. Otherwise, for non-compete forms, there may be a particular distance indicated that you can teach outside of, meaning you may have to drive to the next city over in order to teach. As a result, you will have to spend the time and energy building up multiple followings at geographically separate studios, which is only made more pressing if you are paid a per head rate rather than a per class rate.

Beyond the issue of scheduling, if you are able to find enough work to solely teach fitness classes or work in fitness settings, there is the constant risk for injury and needing to exert extraordinary amounts of energy each day. Again, not dissimilar to other service jobs or forms of manual labor. While there are teaching scenarios where you may not have to physically exert your body but rather focus on providing solely verbal cues, which is certainly its own work, it does not compare to having to physically demonstrate multiple exercise classes a day that are meant to completely spend your clients when they do it only one time. Additionally, I have seen and worked at multiple studios that encourage instructors to demonstrate the class the entire time or fail to teach instructors how to safely teach in a way that does not require the same level of energy expenditure as demonstrating the entire class.

A group fitness instructor herself, Natalia Petrzela discusses the nature of labor precarity in studio settings in her 2019 article "The Precarious Labor of the Fitpro" where she reflects on the history and development of group fitness as a profession in America through the decades. In reaching present day, she discusses how at a conference, when issues of labor were brought up, audience members asked why instructors don't organize—especially to form unions—like other services workers do. Petrzela astutely points out that part of the job of many fitness instructors, especially those working at boutique studios that sell an experience, especially an escape, that "many fitpros feel a responsibility to maintain that fantasy beyond the studio via social media. Interrupting the embodied ideal by pointing out labor conditions rather than panting inspirational exhortations is in itself a considerable professional peril."

Another important point that Petrzela names is how "the physical configuration of group fitness work also inhibits solidarity. Like most classroom educators, instructors spend a great deal of time alone in studios with their students. Unlike personal trainers with 'floor hours' or a

break room in which they spend time together in one location, instructors tend to commute to different gyms and studios, further limiting their contact with each other," additionally this shared time that trainers have guarantees little for them:

> "Within the gym environment, personal trainers may be highly regarded for their physiques. At the same time, they have minimal job security and earning potential. Typically only making $2-$25 per hour, trainers must often work long and erratic hours to make even part-time wages. Trainers must also act as salespeople, continually convincing clients to purchase more sessions or risk lowering their income. Structurally-speaking, then, trainers possess little institutional power and often instruct clients with significantly more occupational prestige and income" (Maguire 2001, 64).

Sticking with group fitness for a moment, instructors are often even not-so-subtly pit against one another where instructors who are able to procure higher attendance are given already optimal time slots to teach whereas instructors who may need help, or are simply less attended due to discrimination on the part of clientele, are given time slots that are inherently harder to gain a following. This does not even begin to touch the explicit favoritism that exists in these spaces—which, again, is not inherently unique to fitness, but certainly adds to labor precarity for many vulnerable workers regardless of profession.

This also does not begin to even touch the sheer inaccessibility of entering fitness as a profession in the first place given that you usually have to have the financial means to even know what the options are in terms of teaching fitness classes. Beyond that, the average price for a 200-hour yoga teacher training, which is the standard training most instructors pursue, is often between $1,000 and $3,000, and requires hundreds of hours of your time not just studying, but actively working for free by teaching yoga classes to earn hours (Matson 2021). Similarly, the average cost of becoming a personal trainer is typically between $400 to $600, and requires documentation such as a government issued I.D., time to study, and often access to a computer (Binford 2018). This doesn't include the cost of continuing education required to maintain

certification either. Additionally, there may be some scenarios where you can receive in-studio training in order to work at that establishment, but this often requires either being a devoted student and being asked to be an instructor or being able to approach studio staff and have your offer be accepted. As a result, while this exists at all of these other junctures, this is particularly where issues around certain bodies being deemed as the right ones to teach fitness classes or to project a specific image comes into play. I can guarantee that if I was not white, thin, able-bodied, or read as cisgender and heterosexual for most of my life, I don't think I would have ever had a career in fitness—especially given that I was able to arrange a deal with the studio I trained at to work in exchange for a discount for training.

The precarious nature of teaching group fitness that Petrzela details in her article also aligns with the way Alan Klein details the working realities of bodybuilders in the 1980s and 1990s. He detailed how many bodybuilders would find themselves living out of their cars as their intensive training schedules would often conflict with working hours. Money would go towards supplements, gym memberships, food, and entry fees. While bodybuilders were able to sometimes earn money doing personal training, many found themselves engaging in "hustling" which could mean a variety of things, but primarily indicated gay sex work.

Klein detailed that the economic nature of bodybuilding was a feudal-capitalist system given that a majority of advertising opportunities and competitions were run by solely a few entities, requiring that bodybuilders appeal to tycoon like Joe and Ben Weider who founded the International Federation of Bodybuilders in order to be signed on and paid for competitions. For example, the Weiders threatened to blacklist bodybuilders who signed with a competitor such as the World Bodybuilding Federation.

Thus the role of group fitness instructor or personal trainer requires not just selling the services or products themselves outright, but selling your own body (both in image and in its actual performative function such as to teach classes or demonstrate), the gym/studio itself, the specific form of fitness, the fitness industry itself, and the idea of lifestyle that is attached to having recreational time and disposable income to devote to fitness (Hutson 2013; Maguire 2001). In the clips that follow, consultants offer their own thoughts and experiences in these more "traditional" gym spaces.

In terms of exploring what differentiates "tradition" versus "inclusive" fitness, there are areas where there is clear distinction and where it is clear that it is perhaps not as much as binary, as a spectrum of factors that constitute each category. In terms of the economies that these spaces perpetuate, it is worth noting that gyms aligned with what is broadly named as the "inclusive" fitness movement go beyond increased pay or offering benefits. For example, SoulCycle and lululemon are leaders in the industry in terms of offering just compensation, full-time employment, paid time off, and benefits (Petrzela 2019; Holman 2019). But places like Radically Fit Oakland and Strength For All NYC demonstrate how it is not just about offering fair compensation within a capitalistic system of exchange, but advocating for different economies of care that include mutual aid.

It is not seeing the gym/studio as simply an oasis of health and wellness if you can enter nor being a discrete entity only defined by the outside world and offering respite or a place to work on the body in private. Rather, gyms/studios aligned with inclusive fitness demonstrate that the gym/studio is an extension of community space, that the space is not meant for escape but rather to gather, and that care does not just mean providing a positive, fun experience within the frame of the class time or within the walls of the gym/studio. Instead, that creating care and

"wellness" is deeply enmeshed in other systemic realities that require acknowledgement. For example, Radically Fit Oakland has a community fridge outside its location that anyone can access. During the uprisings that took place in the summer of 2020 in response to police brutality disproportionately affecting BIPOC, especially Black communities, Strength for All NYC assembled and distributed protestor safety kits to enable protestors to attempt to care for themselves against the particularly brutal response from the NYPD towards protestors. These are certainly not the only two gyms that engaged in these types of practices.

I also want to briefly distinguish how the actions of Radically Fit Oakland and Strength for All NYC, while responding to a clear immediate need in their communities, were not reactionary or new but borne out of a long-standing commitments towards destabilizing otherwise transactional attempts to secure bonds or community, as witnessed by many other studios and gyms who may have hosted donation classes and given money towards Black Lives Matter-related causes, but did not change their hiring processes, did not invest in BIPOC anti-racist education, were not out on the streets with protestors or providing care for those putting their bodies on the line. Rather, these actions in many ways replicated the very issues of creating this idea of the oasis away from reality where, in this fantasy, racism could be solved by doing the same thing you always do—attending a yoga or spin class—and that transaction being a solution to a deeply systemic issue, without any structural change within the space itself. I highlight this because, like Maguire points out, it is impossible to address labor precarity without looking at fitness as being a component of a larger form of consumer culture and being connected to larger economies (2001).

LABOR: EXPLOITATION & PRECARITY INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Labor in Fitness — Ilya Parker

Bri: And I would just be curious if you'd be willing to delve a little bit into the time that you were doing personal training more often and talking about your experience of like working at gyms and just like what that looks like on the labor side of things.

Ilya: So for me, my experience is, is like a lot of I feel Black personal trainers in areas where it's just not is just a very specific niche of what personal trainer can look like. So I never I worked at a gym and this is where the anti Blackness and the classism and all of this and transphobia comes into play. So first, when I started a personal training, I couldn't afford to get a certification, number one. So I just called myself a personal trainer friend, some business cards. And a lot of people do that. A lot of personal trainers, they'll print their cars and just sit them out in a gym. So I never worked for a gym. I joined gyms and. And then I met people in there and then I just had to jump from gym to gym so I wouldn't figure it out, so I just train people as if I was bringing a buddy into the gym. Now, when I worked at a gym, I worked at a big boxing gym in Durham for about a month. I came in and was supposed to be hired as a coach, extremely low wage. They actually told me, hey, we're gonna bring you in at this hourly rate and and then you're going to work a little bit just as the front desk attendant or whatever it was called. I can't remember. And then we're going to ease you where easily this one coach out we're going to do in and about a month. So that month came and it never happened. And then actually another white person says this man was hired as the coach. And then I just kind of was stuck in this desk position. And what was interesting enough was all of the people that work at the desk were Black. All of the people that worked at the desk also had a visual aesthetic that didn't line up with what a personal trainer should look like. I'm fat, "too short."

We're looking to, you know, just just different just different variants. And so, know, I went to management and I'm like, "Hey, what's up? I thought I was supposed to be coaching." And they were just like, "We're going to work with this guy." And so I don't have a specific I never had the opportunity to be a coach in a gym, nor have I honestly wanted to because I know they get paid. Productivity is the thing that I have that I'm very much aware of being a physical therapist assistant. It was all about the numbers, hourly rates, but we always had to hit a certain amount of patience to even be seen as our work day being valid. Never mind all the shit we put up with just working with people in general, especially people moving their bodies. So that's all I can really speak to with the procurement piece because I just don't have firsthand experience.

Labor in Fitness — Courtney Marshall

Courtney: So so. Yes. So that was the first time that I really started to think about like labor structures at the gym. And so I've since I started, I worked I worked as an intern for one gym and this was back when I was still a professor. So my last year of being a professor, I would go teach my classes and then I would go. It would be like an intern. I still have my little notebook. I, like, write down. Like, this is how the workout goes. And then I wound up leaving that gym and then I work for the YMCA. So that's been mostly my experiences working for YMCA. And I've also

worked for another private, not a chain, but there's a couple of locations and other and I've also worked through local parks and rec, so place and I get a percentage based on how many people come. But again, it's tough because like I said, like, I have no desire to boost numbers. I don't do that kind of typical fitness advertising. Like, I, I would never write burns calories and anything that I don't do it right at all because I say everything I say, well, if everything burns, calories flow.

What makes your my class any better than, you know, doing something else. Like I have something else to bring people to class. But I've I've always I've been struck by kind of how I was treated as a professor. Right. So if I don't go to class, I just said I'm not in class today. Students like and they're like, yeah, I'm sure. Right. But I don't lose money because I'm not in class. Right. And so that's what really got me thinking about, like, oh, what if the gym closes because of a snowstorm? These people don't teach and they don't get paid. Then I started to see like there was there were people who taught at the gym who did it, like on the side. Right. So me like Zumba. And even now today, the free classes that I teach, I teach free classes all week long because I love Zumba. And I was like, well, I'm not taking the class. I'm, I don't teach it. All right. And but there were people who were working at multiple gyms and that just was people who I was like, how much do you teach? And it was just it. And it was very much like adjunct professors. I going from campus to campus trying to build relationships, not knowing their schedule until the last minute. And at the Y, the one where I was, they would do seasonal schedules. So you wouldn't know if your class was going to make it. I mean, I taught Sunday mornings, so nobody was that nobody wanted no competition. And then it all ended up. And actually I used to work in I lived in Rochester, New Hampshire, and I taught in Rochester, New Hampshire.

Then I moved to Exeter. So now that gym is about forty five minutes away. But I still drove like every week because I just love the class I love so much. They're oh they're so good. But so that's what really got me interested in that is like how do you how do instructors are they're told to like care for their bodies, but they're teaching just like they're sick and they're still coming to class and they're not making a decent wage, particularly because like the Y like they will always say, like the Y can barely keep his lights on anyway. But and I just wonder, like, what was so let me say this. So, so when I talk about critique my critiques of like diet, culture and fat phobia in the gym, I used to, I think, be more critical of the instructors. I mean, I'm still critical, but now I see. How using that language helps them build their class and so that is a part of life survival that's so interesting. Yeah, so I don't know. And I and I also realize I have, you know, the privilege to be able to say this is not what I want to do because I'm not relying on folks and I am because I want my classes to be for folks who can't pay like I. Right. Because then I get all these other people but the other people, they're like, can we pay you? And I'm like, no, even today I say, take whatever you would pay me and I want you to go and buy somebody some groceries. Like I said, don't give it to organization. Right? Actually, if they have a website, do not give it to organize. Would go find there's somebody in your community if you don't know who that is. Find out who knows who that is. There's somebody who could take that 50 dollars and buy groceries this week, like do some direct giving. I'm the biggest direct giving stopper website and they send you a postage fee envelope like they are fine. Right? The NAACP is fine. OK, right. So I guess that's where that's where I've been. So I guess when I started thinking about capitalism, it really was about like payment structures at the gym. Who could afford to go, how child care hours were set up for people with particular types of jobs. You know, there was no like nighttime child care. Even at the Y where I work, there's no Sunday

child care. So the sense of like who is the worker that they're catering to is an issue. And then it got bigger to think about. What are the actual labor conditions of instructors? You know, I don't know of any instructors who have done any collective action around, you know, anything, anything related to gyms. I know I saw some people upset about, like, closures during covid, but those seem to be owners. Not really.

Labor in Fitness — Asher Freeman

Asher: Yeah. Yeah. So, part of it is like just being expected to do like floor hours, where we're like soliciting sessions and I mean, this is a this is not just like exploitative of the workers, it's just disgusting. Like I was told like, oh, well, you should really, like, approach women because women are the ones who are more insecure and they're more likely to, like, pay for personal training. And when you approach them, just tell them what they're doing wrong. So just like be on the floor looking out for women at this gym and just walk up to them and tell them what they're doing wrong. But like the floor hours, you know, are not compensated.

And then we're given, like, long lists of like the members and we're supposed to, like, call through on our own time that's not compensated and try to, like, sell people on memberships. So do all of this sales, like probably more hours of sales when you're actually training people and be really grateful that we're being being given these leads [sarcasm]. And then when we do sign people up for personal training, like the the gym, which does none of it, you know, they didn't give us any kind of training or anything like that. All they have is like the cap- all they have is the building, the structure and the the equipment inside of it. They take like at least half of everything you make when you actually are training. So it's just like the expectation of unpaid labor, like, you know, they're like, "Yeah, you can sign up to teach classes and you get paid thirty dollars. But if less than four people come to your classes, then you get paid nothing." And I was just like, I don't think that's legal. I don't think you can like like what would stop me from like walking out if that's the case. So a lot of things that I'm pretty sure are illegal and just like really, yeah, lots of expectations of unpaid labor. And then when we do get paid, just having the corporation take like a very large chunk of it.

Labor in Fitness — Lore McSpadden

Bri: The labor precarity of the fitness industry and how labor is treated differently between mainstream fitness and quote unquote inclusive fitness. What were the differences that you want to establish between the ways that, you know, maybe you experience, like, for example, like certain tax forms or payment when you were an employee versus in trying to create your own space?

Lore: The mainstream fitness industry is, I have no hesitation saying unethical to its core.

BMS: Yeah.

LM: That's labor practices and a lot of gym owners take advantage of the fact that personal trainers are often there at different times throughout the day and rarely connect with each other. And many personal trainers at the same facility may never meet each other.

BMS: Yeah.

LM: And and even those who are there at the same time are more likely just interacting with their students than with each other. And that's further exacerbated by the common practice of gyms to only pay trainers for the times that they're coaching. Yeah. And so it creates a system in which unionization is very hard. Yeah. Because personal trainers oftentimes don't talk to each other, don't compare pay rates, don't compare the labor, don't realize that a lot of what frustrates them is frustrating everyone else there and is oftentimes illegal.

BMS: Yeah.

LM: Right. Like someone's like if someone came on and they signed a paper with H.R. that specifies their time per hour. And instead of per session, then that person should be paying for their programing to pay for the programing time. Right. Because that's time spent. Now they agree to time works per session, then that better pay, better be higher per like than what the pay would be per hour. Right. To acknowledge that there is time spent outside of the session preparing for that session from putting together a plan to setting up the equipment to. Yeah. Yeah. And so if a personal trainer got is paid per hour, that employer absolutely better be paying them for their programing time. And if the pay is perception, then not absolutely better be higher pay than they're being paid for. And so, you know, in the pandemic, we've gone back to the smaller space where we started. We had a larger commercial space where we had a larger team. Now, when we do when we do have. Coaches do either something, you know, through Zoom for a group exercise class or whatever, or, of course, when they were in person, the majority of the money that the student paid went to them, and that is the exception in the industry, right? And so are we never gave or give because our well, our team is smaller than it was prior to the pandemic in terms of people who are working on a weekly basis. We still bring people on we would never pay them less than 60 percent of our base, lowest paid with 60 percent of what we charged.

BMS: Right, right. Right.

LM: And so, yes, there was some money going towards overhead and rent and insurance, but we did not feel that it was ethical to take the majority of the money paid for the coach's expertise.

BMS: Right.

LM: And. And then building from from there and really giving, like if we're going to give our students body autonomy in terms of honoring the priorities they set with their time and energy, doing the same for coaches who are either unemployed or as contractors like.

BMS: Yeah.

LM: Giving them like we are- with very few exceptions, only work like all of our team members are and were grown as adults and most of our students are, we only have a few, right? We do some who aren't. But. This idea that like an employer needs to say how many hours someone needs to work and in what way. And. It's really dehumanizing editorializing. Yeah, and making sure that all of the people on our team know and connect with each other instead of that

separation of like a lot of gyms can depend upon. Yes. I'm not comparing notes. Yeah, I don't mean. And even so. I want to be clear, so like we didn't.
We had conversations with our team through the pandemic about what they wanted to do and in what ways, and many of them, that's because of the bullshit of capitalism needed to change. They're the focus of their work and give more in other directions than on personal training and exercise instruction.

BMS: Right.

LM: But like we. Did several fundraisers that link together, we gave all of our team members bonuses through the start of the pandemic, and when we did downsize back to our original space and did an auction for some of the equipment, we split up, half of that money went directly to local Black community organizers and of it was split between our team members, like being really, really investing in. The. Flourishing of like ourselves and our team members not as an afterthought, but as an essential part of the business plan.

SUMMARY

These clips both echo the aforementioned realities of labor in the fitness industry while also imagining new possibilities for it. Ilya Parker, Asher Freeman, and Lore McSpadden are explicit in talking about the unpaid hours doing sales, low pay rates, the reliance upon fitness professionals not talking to one another to perpetuate illegal and unethical practices, and the reality of Black individuals being relegated to solely cleaning and service tasks, especially those tasks that are ultimately service to white trainers.

Courtney Marshall offers a thought-provoking reflection on the real duality that exists within the reality of fitness as a profession. Courtney herself does not seek compensation for her classes, which allows these classes to open to more people and inherently more accessible in that avenue. Conversely, she acknowledges that that isn't possible if you are a fitness instructor with bills to pay. While it is crucial to be critical of instructors and how they perpetuate rhetoric and language rooted in fatphobia, for example, she also acknowledges that there is a reality that that kind of language is often a requirement to survive in the industry.

Each of them also offer either rhetorically or through action different possibilities—and networks of exchange—compared to those otherwise dictated by the fitness industry. Remaining with Courtney, she asks people to give money to someone in their community rather than paying her for class, and she explicitly mentions that it should be an individual rather than a significantly large organization like the NAACP. Ilya used the gym space that would not treat them seriously as a space to grow their own following and base of support. Asher pushes back against exploitative pay structures and offers the idea of walking out of the room if they wouldn't be paid. Lore offers a number of policies that they have implemented at their own gym, Positive Force Movement, that stand in opposition to the otherwise traditional systems of compensation and interaction including encouraging connection between trainers, creating appropriately compensatory pay rates, giving back to Black organizers in their communities, and more.

In all, this seems to demonstrate that "inclusive" fitness is not simply interested in solely reformist measures, but completely questioning and reimagining how exchange, labor, economies, and care intersect with one another in a gym/studio space or personal training practice and their connection to the larger local community.

REFLECTIONS WITH JUSTICE WILLIAMS

Transcript from Video Interview

Bri: Right, um, yeah, what you speak on about the idea of capital and producing capital through the body, um, and through your body actually really leads perfectly into another conversation, um, that of another section, uh, where some of the folks that, um, you know, spoke on through this project, uh, talked about their experience, um, you know, very literally of working in gyms or working as fitness professionals, um. And so, specifically talking about labor precarity and exploitation, um, in that, you know, the beyond the I don't want to say abstract- but beyond these ways that the fitness industry, in industry as a whole, demands the product- production of particular bodies and the usage of particular bodies that, um, very specifically also when people are working, you know, specifically in these jobs in the fitness industry, um, the exploitation that takes place, the precocity that exists there, um, and just because I feel like so often, um, people

look at the fitness industry like look at these gyms and studios as these like oases like away from the rest of life and that's like how they market themselves and therefore, you know, these ideas of needing to sustain oneself, the idea of ethical labor practices, really, you know, end up, uh, there was actually an article that I reference in this section that talks about how, you know, for certain, especially like group fitness instructor where they're selling this idea of luxury, um, the idea of even bringing up the idea of labor exploitation threatens their entire, like, the entire image of it and their ability to even maintain that job and people went on to talk about their experiences of you know, not receiving pay, you know, the list goes on, um. So yeah, I would love to hear your comments on that.

Justice: Can you repeat that?

BMS: Yeah, um, mostly just thinking about, you know, beyond these ways you know there are these implicit ways that industry itself requires bodies like your own to produce capital, in this like overall sense, but then also when you're working in these gyms, working as a fitness professional that way that, um, the way that plays out in that more explicit manner of the precarity and exploitation that takes place in gyms, studios, and through the fitness profession.

JRW: I think that, um, one of the things that we're doing through our, um, organization is we're talking about what- what has happened with Black bodies from you know, not deep history, but the history, the historical context framing it from entering this land, the land of the Indigenous and how we got here, right. And so, in- in the ways that our bodies have been used for white supremacy culture to keep white bodies healthy in the ways for white supremacist culture we have been used like donkeys or- or animals in the ways, uh, still today where Black lives are being lost and the question we still ask, "Do Black lives matter?" I feel like there is and we don't see it, this claim on Black bodies. We are not intellectuals, right, I could read something and then argue something but it's still not valid unless I am using a white author or writer. It's so deep within our subconscious underneath and that's where we got to get, we got to get to the below, the depth, not the surface. It's so deep within us that it is normal, right, it is a norm.

So when I think about the ways that I work when I go to work in the fitness industry and we think about the Fitness Industrial Complex and we think about white supremacist culture and we think about the root of what an intellectual looks like in the service of this work and all institutions are in relation to whiteness, white bodies, so white bodies are the authority both intellectually in this. You know, as a trainer I'm not looked at seriously with the knowledge that I have right, so then it goes into clientele because unfortunately there are more white people in the world than there is diversity so white people has taken up themselves to go where they feel comfortable, right, and what they've been told, right, so they've been told, you know, other white people know what they doing and they've internalized the criminalization, the erasure of the Black body, right. The consumption is always for white people not for ourselves, right. So, in these ways we are still salves to whiteness and white- and we don't see that, right? Black lives matter, Black lives are dying at a tremendous rate, whether we see them and they are sensationalized or not. They are dying within systems that are connected to whiteness and white supremacy every day. Every day. And we don't make those connections because we don't talk about the depth of these ideas that are underneath our subconscious that we continue to battle with, even if we consider ourselves allies in this work, which is a lie, because we're still battling the demons of comfort in our inability to let that go every month. That's privilege, but anyway,

back to your initial question around this hierarchy that we live within and how that is framed from our bodies and otherness and how we've all as a community in a society have internalized these very thoughts that diminish the intellectual ability of a Black person. So I'm not respected within fitness institutions because they don't see me as smart.

Anything that is attached to Blackness and even Black people think it's secondary when we put our money into things, we ensure that there is some type of white which makes it alright. We don't even invest in ourselves because we've been lied to about our own intellect. We don't talk about Egyptians. We don't talk about, we- we just don't talk about where we're smart. It's just crazy because we've all been eluded that the smartest man is the white man and we is just all underneath that. So I get what people are talking about when they're not respected in spaces is the other, right, because those spaces are the same institutions that are framed on a construct to maintain power for they say a small few, but power for those who want to remain comfortable in their privilege. I'm not going to say a few anymore, because we all do it. I don't care where you are on the line. I do it, too. There are many ways that I have to question myself and question the ways that I am comfortable and am I willing to give that up to fight today. So, we have to really think about the depth of this. The depth of the work that we have t odd on an interpersonal, internal, interpersonal level and then we can frame it beyond that on an institutional level and therefore reframing the very ideas that these systems are based off of. Until we're able to do this, no true change will come. We'll continue to receive the crumbs that are delivered in the evolution of time that they lie to us that change has happened. It's the technology of slavery.

I don't care how rich you are, there's still somebody richer and all of that money is going to them. You know what I'm saying, right, so I'm good. I just be like I laugh a lot because I think on weird ways, I know I think weird ways because sometimes people are thinking they'd be like what are you talking about? I'm here in this meeting with you right now, you is actually performing some shit to pull everybody in to do something that you feel is a priority but it doesn't prioritize, right, our need for collective- true collective work, right? You just want us to join your bridge and I'm good! You know, I'm good with that, right, ain't got I'm going to illuminate that it's all the same and that as we continue to battle and separate ourselves and allow the media to separate us like Black people from Asian people, right, we just had a death within the Asian community that highlights the hate that's been going on and then now we have a death in the Black community, right. So let's see what happens, how we continue to separate from ourselves but nor realize and articulate that it's the same fucking hate. No. We sit and we talk about, hey, did they were they performative, did they go to a rally for us? Meanwhile, this Black guy right here, loves everyone. And I do this for everyone. Not just Black lives, but for all lives. I don't perform. It's an action. I do. But people don't know that because we are invested in the lie of separation, even the ways that we are oppressed are saying we pull closer to whiteness, my oppression is harder and more important that yours. Really? Really? It's not, because it all comes from the same source and unfortunately, my life mattered more because it is interwoven into my very DNA, so I think we should prioritize that and then answer me, do Black lives matter?

LOOKING FORWARD

While the inclusive fitness movement clearly has particular goals at its center and numerous individuals have been engaging in their own autonomous actions to remedy the defined issues with traditional fitness, where is there still room for growth?

This is particularly relevant given the predecessor of this movement can be found in the body positivity movement, a movement that was violently co-opted from its initial aims addressing the dehumanization and discrimination faced by fat people, especially QTBIPOC, into a campaign about self-confidence centered around white, thin or midsize, abled bodies (Frazier & Medhi 2021). This process transformed a critique about systemic injustices centering anti-racism, disability justice, and intersectional feminism, into an individual problem and responsibility where self-acceptance and confidence must be marketable, palatable, consumable, and exploitable—and often the marketing power of it comes from the fact that said confidence exists in the face of the very systemic issues that the movement originally sought to accomplish. While the entirety of this site and the featured interviews demonstrate that the inclusive fitness movement, at its heart and with movements that go beyond inclusiveness, goes beyond a checklist for every gym or studio to accomplish and resists the idea of singular strategies to solve multivariate issues. That being said, like the body positivity movement, there is always the risk of co-optation.

Additionally, even if the movement is accomplishing all or part of its goals, there is always the need for critique to consistently reassess its progress, goals, and aims. In the section, the clips feature the reflections of some interviewees about their thoughts on what still needs to be accomplished, and also what issues have seen some traction and movement from the efforts of the inclusive fitness movement.

LOOKING FORWARD INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Looking Forward — Courtney Marshall

Courtney: When I when I was an instructor, I would tell people this is when I was on social media. I would say if you are a fat person and you want a Zumba, I would pay for your Zumba license. If you want to go and you want to do yoga teacher training again touched me because I want to see more instructor. I want I didn't want people to feel like they couldn't be instructors. Right. So that was another shift for me in thinking about inclusion. It was it was inclusion, like being a client, being a participant in the class. But I was like, how do you make people feel like they can be included as a staff member? And I think that's where we have it to me from where I sit. We have not made much progress on that, at least like I would say from where I sit here in New Hampshire, I have not I have not seen it. And I see people that you like, they go off and maybe this is also where the Internet comes in, because then you can go off and you can just be a brand by yourself. It's like branding, right? I'm I'm going to brand myself as an inclusive fitness person and so they just be putting up anything, anybody is anybody, which is a good thing, right? Anybody can do it right. We want that kind of like anybody. You don't need a building, right. To do right. But it also leaves us open to still people who might not be giving the best.

Looking Forward — Beck Beverage

Bri: And like, where do you feel like there's some work that is left to like, really beyond just like the normal there's work to be done, but like, well, there is some stuff that needs to continue to happen.

Beck: Yeah, I think that that more and more like people are… there has been a lot of success around creating spaces and marketing and advertising for lots of people of all different bodies and that sort of thing, like I think that it is relatively easy now either to find something virtually or to find something in most major cities that most people can walk in and and. Like, not have a bad time, but not have a bad social interaction. But I think that this this other piece around training and training styles, I think that that's where the major. Yeah. Is that can be done. I see so many places. Yeah. I'm going to call it the barbell stuff, for example, like that's like a real pet peeve of mine personally, because it locks your body into one specific pattern of lifting. And if

you are someone who is deep into the tendencies that we all sort of have, these tendencies that we move with when our threat level is higher. So if we're deep into those tendencies, we're not moving like symmetrically and bilaterally and nobody really does that just to start with. But the higher your threat level is, the more you're definitely not doing that. Right. So these dominant training methodologies like the body built like this straight up like bodybuilding machine stuff and barbell lifting a lot of the the the like yoga stuff that anything that, like, really overemphasizes specific postures. I think if that's all stuff that we really need to just like break down, what are we doing? Why are we doing it and then throw it away.

Looking Forward — Asher Freeman

Bri: And also what do you feel like really still needs work like in that like inclusive fitness space.

Asher: Yeah. I mean so like a big thing for me is like not just like how are you treating your clients and how are you communicating about fitness, but like where is the profit that you're making going like is it going to like the workers, is it going to your community or is it going somewhere else? So like even if someone has like the best, like, fat-positive, and, you know, like whatever I like, like the best practices within personal training, within group fitness, like if it's like a capitalist business, that's like I see as like exploit like exploiting people in some way, then, like I'm not really interested, like, for example, like a lot of times like brands or whatever, we'll get in touch because they're like, we want to do this, like, campaign and like to do this whatever. And it's like I'm like, no, like you probably have people like making those clothes in sweatshops, like whatever it says on the T-shirt, I don't really care like this, but yeah, if so, usually like I'm much more likely to partner with someone who isn't like that isn't like a big business owner, I have like there are some like small business owners that I really love who I think are doing a good job caring for people. But yeah, beyond that and I think like. Yeah, like somebody who's like selling weight loss is definitely like a big red flag on someone who's like uses like gendered language to talk about fitness, like sometimes I will partner with people like that if they're like trans inclusive or like at least like open to having that conversation, especially like places that have like women specific offerings. But yeah, I think.

Like oftentimes like if I'm going to collaborate with someone, like I have to know them pretty well, like I have to have like real conversations with them, not just on the Internet and like just like getting to know, like, all right, cool. Like, how do you get politicized and like what, you know, like how do you, like, carry out your values and your work and knowing that people have like sliding scales and like no cost options for like what they offer. Like, those are like I don't I don't know. I guess it's a lot of things.

It's like looking for red flags first and then just like seeing where people are at and sometimes people are like, yeah, like people are in the fitness industry and they are like, I don't want to be like exclusive about like, you know, information about like how to create inclusivity. So if someone's like in the industry and they're like, oh shit. Like, I, I need to work on some things, like I'm down to talk to people, you know, we all need to work on some things. So I don't need people to be perfect to work with them.

Progress in Inclusive Fitness — Joy Cox

Joy: So I think some kind of long by way of community, I think that people are finding ways to connect with one another, various identities are connecting with one another. And I think that on some level, these communities have the ear of the larger public. So they're not just creating these small communities where only they know about what's going on, but they also have caught the attention of larger brands and they are also peeking over like, "OK, well, what is this?" So I think that there has been some progress made as it relates to that. I mean, I think ongoing issues are always going to be that the most marginalized are pushed to the margins. So they are the people who are silenced the most. And I think that we've got to talk about the LGBT community and visibility and giving a voice.

There are a lot of things that I've learned personally as being involved with the community and hearing their thoughts and their takes on things. And so I think that that is important because even within the community, there needs to be continued education. Obviously, that will be a still a thing. So I think that that's also something that needs to continue to be continue to grow and visibility around those things. You find that people are definitely more accepting of your average larger body. But when we start talking about superfat bodies, what's also known as infinifat bodies, those are the bodies you typically see on my six hundred pound, like the old people moving and being active, I still think that there is a certain knee jerk reaction to reject, to be standoffish towards. To see a change in their body that results in some type of weight loss and things of that nature. And then I think to when we talk about abilities, I think that's also a thing.

So people who are neurodivergent, people who, you know, people who are hard of hearing. So where are your ASL instructors? Do they have a platform? Just different things like that, I think are ways by which things can definitely continue to grow. And I think that people on the outside will have to be. I don't know if the word is convince, but I think that one thing that's really cool about these communities is that they're they're not actively working, per say, to gain the approval of the right. Right. And so it's kind of like the majority has to do work on their own to come into these spaces, if you want to be part of it is like you got to show up, you've got to do the work, et cetera, et cetera. And I think that there's a value to that because then we're not spending all our energy trying to convince other people that we're worthwhile. Instead, we're we're we're channeling our energy to the people who need it the most. And we're being we're being the help that that we wish someone would have been for us. And so. I guess that would be my answer.

SUMMARY

Courtney Marshall is the one who names how some people brand themselves as inclusive, but questions what that inclusion truly means and who it is serving, saying while it is important to make class participants feel included, what about staff members? Asher Freeman similarly affirms that inclusive fitness goes beyond messaging alone, much like Courtney talking

about not wanting to be an influencer and just having inclusive fitness as a brand. Rather, Asher points out how the practice needs to extend beyond simply what happens in the room while teaching class, but includes where the money goes and what gyms ultimately fund with their profits—is it the community and people who work there, or is it ventures that are inherently anti-thetical to the movement as a whole or other issues at the end of the day?

In terms of what happens in the actual practice of fitness, Beck Beverage suggests the importance of questioning what the dominant training methods are, why they are used, and throw away what is not in service to these other goals. Similarly, Joy points out that the inclusive fitness movement has made progress through getting larger industries to at least get curious about what is going on, but that, as with most issues and movements, the most marginalized will always be pushed to the edges and it requires active practice to center them again. Joy names groups that need to be put in the center as fat, especially superfat and infinifat, people, neurodivergent people, and disabled people, asking where the ASL interpreters. Both Beck and Joy speak to how it is not just matter of perfecting the traditional practice of fitness in a more inclusive manner, but ultimately restructuring the conception of fitness, access, and inclusivity as they intersect—which is elaborated by Courtney and Asher's points.

REFLECTIONS WITH JUSTICE WILLIAMS

Transcript from Video Interview

Bri: This leads perfectly into what is being discussed next in the way that this flows, um, which was that folks I talked to, uh, we discussed, you know, where for this movement in fitness, you know, where have things been accomplished, you know, and, um, things have moved around and changed, uh, and where is there a lot of work that still needs to be done? And, you know, in what ways is there sometimes, um you know, not bad attention, and I think that these conversations especially happen with the body positivity movement as like a backdrop to it, and seeing how, you know, for any movement that there is a, like, I mean essentially, and you know this, is that whiteness and white supremacy will always seek to co-opt it into a way to capitalize upon it, you

know. And seeing that with the body positivity movement, where, uh, you know, the marginalized remain marginalized, um, and it becomes a movement about you know white cisgender you know a still relatively, uh, you know "default normative- normative" body, um, and I think it's actually Joy that says in her interview, where it's like yeah, the marginalized will always be pushed to the margins, um, and os just keeping that in mind. Um, so yeah, I think my- the most I- you already started to talk about this, of the need for collective movement and change, um, but just looking forward at this movement, what do you feel like is really kind of I don't want to say like the next steps because that sounds like kind of reductive, uh but rather maybe just what are the priorities that you want to center.

Justice: So, I no longer want to center white fragility. That is one thing that I am far from, whiteness is not frail, it is, I don't care if a white man cries. That is actually allowed in white supremacist culture. Black men can't cry, though. White men can determine what masculinity looks like in any moment of their lives, that's white supremacist culture and still be able to live in this framework with comfort and access and ability to move fluid. So I think that, um, it's hard to say because we are so siloed up. It's become like an olympics for oppression. Like oh this is first, this is second, like I was talking to you the priority is always in relation to whiteness and what this theme is and pulling and this is how you mute- you mute things by using the tools when a white man says something.

Oh, I think about this way using Black people's language, oh community, I'm creating community at my certification, but I'm gonna do it in a white way where it's secondary, right. We're gonna walk into this space and we're gonna frame the intellectual value of this space is white bodies, white movement patterns, white teachers who have inspired the teacher to do this so whiteness, whiteness, whiteness. And then day two, you want to talk community. That's because that is secondary to highlighting whiteness and empowering and inspiring whiteness and elevating whiteness no matter who's there. Giving position to white people to do whatever they need to do towards around with the other bodies in the room. I could use this other body as an example of what's- what's wrong with that movement patter and the way I see it, in that body right, so even everything that we are learning everything that we're learning is our inability to see connection and we don't even see that all right. It's so blind. We're like horses with the blinders on like I'm going out this way! So I'd be like yo, I'm just- I just would like you to take a second to go like this, right? Would you say more than just yourself, right, so if we're Abel to embody that, right, if we're not like led to water which is probably toxic water because they don't give a fuck about you anyway. They just want to lead you to some shit just so that it's established that they're still in power, right? So take the blinders off, let's go throw some good ass water. Why are we going to up to the muddy water and shit. You know what I'm saying?

I'm just like, I think about the fitness industry is the last call. But I think about the, in the fitness industry is the fitness call because otherness around our bodies was created around our bodies and fitness is the science of movement in order bodies in a way, right, manifest that right in our relationship to is. So and it's the last industry where we are discussing the other. We are discussing these issues around lens, so what's happening is people isolate themselves at first, just like in any movement I was a part of. Oh ability is more important right now, oh, Black people are more important right now, oh gender is is more important right now, oh, and we go on and on and on to how we have been categorized and then we go on and it gets long. I mean I get fucking tired myself just sitting there listening to all of this shit. I'm just like damn, it's a lot, right? So then it becomes overwhelming and therefore we become competitive because it's so

overwhelming to see beyond our isolation, right? Our connectivity and and to also see that- that can activate actually is the tool we need to eradicate and create the change that will allow access-accessibility for us to be our whole authentic selves. So, unfortunately, and this is the movement that my hope and vision that Fitness4AllBodies is, it's really illuminating that there is no priority. The priority is us. We do need spaces to heal, that's our silos, I would never take that away. But we still got to come back together and connect together and show in ways that we've all learned the same messages together in the only way we're going to change it and erase it is together.

NEW FITNESS WORLDS

Ultimately, like any work centered in abolition of systems, the inclusive fitness movement at its heart—and the movements that take its goals even further like the aim to decolonize fitness—while a great deal of their work is in tearing down and dismantling what is named as a harmful, violent system that is both a product and agent of white supremacy, it is just as much about imagination and dreaming of new possibilities. It is about moving into a space where it can be said with certainty that the current system is untenable, but that there does not have to be an immediate answer or solution—though that can certainly exist—but rather a stepping into a purposeful unknowing. This state of unknowing encapsulates that fitness professionals do not, and should not, be the experts of anyone's bodies, as Lore speaks on in this section that concepts of access can be inherently contradictory, that in order for fitness to truly be for everyone there will be the paradox of it being individualized to the point of generalization at moments, but it is the flexibility and flux of being rooted in holding space for constantly oscillating experiences that prevents it from becoming like the fixed answer of "traditional" fitness.

In this section, that process of creation and imagination are offered, from the work of Fitness4AllBodies to Rooted Resistance, the possibilities that digital space provides, to expanding upon economies of care, the process of creating a gym space, and more. These are the visions and creations that are promised through this work.

NEW FITNESS WORLDS INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

The Potential of Digital Spaces — Joy Cox

Bri: And maybe this actually can connect back to the app is like, what possibilities do you think digital realms provide in moving forward that may not be as readily available in like strictly physical spaces?

Joy: I mean, so one, I think we- we provide space. Right. So there is this sense of like the spaces is is unlimited. Right. You can be anywhere and have and have access and have contact. I think there's also the sense of I mean, I think at least for my app is like bringing the people who you want to be nearby with you everywhere you go, so and so I think, like digital realms can utilize that in a way that your traditional typical places can't. You're used to going into the gym with a particular person and move five hundred miles away from each other.

You can't right, but you can log on to an app. You can have a chat. Right. You still work out and do the whole, whatever your regimen is like, you can still do all of those things. And then I do think, you know, for me personally, like I'm an introvert and I think that there is a certain value in being able to turn on the video and see everybody else, but not actually have them physically present. I mean, I know there's a lot of people who are talking about the impact of the pandemic and how they wish they could be around people. And I think that that has its space. But I also like the idea like I can do this here with everyone, but by myself. I think that digital platforms give people an opportunity who can do things and mess up if you're the type of person who that weighs heavily on, you know, I mean, I can remember being in step classes and being like, I'm never going back. I can't get the combination like we have at practice. How do you do a six step combination if we haven't a practiced?! That sort of thing. And it's like, well Joy, you don't have to be good at this. But like for some people, that's really off-putting. So I'd rather practice at home rather messed up and do those things.

And so I think, like, you know, I think even as it relates to access, I think there's representation that's going to be expanded. Right. I can see people who look like me. They may not be where I am, people who are trying new things. I think that connection thing is a big part of that place to the value of life, the digital component, not saying that people will become best friends, but I think it connects people and places in ways that traditional traditional fitness places spots won't be able to do.

The Jabbie App & Inclusive Fitness — Joy Cox

Joy: Yeah. So I think, you know, as it relates to the app. Right. So weight loss is nowhere in there. Right. And there's this emphasis on you being able to do what you can, how you can still kind of stripping or taking back the power of movement refocussing with centering you. Right. So our our people are in the center. What do you want to do? How do you want to do it right. How long do you want to do it for? And so really kind of removing the rules around the idea of what makes fitness effective. And and I think that. I mean, I don't know if I'm answering your question as it relates to this, but I think that those were the like I didn't see any of that in the.

Right. And the gyms that that I work that I was in, there's always a number there's always a set, rep, a time limit, and so I think with the centering people as the focus and not a regimen and not a goal or not an outcome, right. We just we just we just one community. We just want people to be safe where they are to move their bodies the way that they see fit, whatever it is that they do. We don't care what they do in some ways. Right. Yeah. So I don't know if that answers your question.

Bri: Oh, absolutely. No, that was I really that I love the way that you characterize that because. Yeah, like even that not to binarize it but like that difference between like measurement as like God versus it being a process and not necessarily like having to have even like an explicit goal I think is just like so different. And I think that's what was so interesting to me about the app, because like I remember at one of actually one of the Fitness4AllBodies panels, and this was like kind of echoed by all of the panelists. I remember I think it was Roc specifically, explicitly talked about—and it just really spoke to me from seeing, again, all of this work and really just what I was seeing as like a misunderstanding from a lot of like even like fitness trainers that were like trying is they explicitly said, like, you know, you can't just, like, add things on top of like these gym spaces. Like you need to completely, like, take all of these ways that you've built these spaces and completely rebuild it from the ground up. And that has been really something that I've thought about in relation to your app. And I find it especially interesting because it is like in the digital space. And just like what that can allow, I don't know if you want to comment on that at all before I just like, you know, completely go into another question. Feel free to continue off of that.

Joy: No, I mean, I think I think to Roc's point, we are so far gone, I think within the fitness industry that there does need to be a dismantling of of structures and what that looks like and what that means, even down to training, because the way that fitness is taught, there's certain ideologies that are embedded within certain assumptions about bodies and abilities that are embedded in those things I talk about all the time, like why are modifications called modifications?

Like they're not right. Like it's just another way to do an exercise. But it's often framed as though a modification is for the less capable. Right. Right. And so, like, there's a hierarchy there, there's a lot of things that I would say that would be. What we seek to do is to connect people with community and with trainers and with members who will celebrate them, where they are as they participate and the body movements that they choose to do. Right. And we are not showing up and saying, oh, you are practicing this former traditional fitness and this isn't good. If that works for you, fine. But within the structure of our right, we're not promoting those things. Within what we're doing, we're looking to this man. So how fitness is being done or at least how it's showing up and registering on an online platform that allows anybody to participate as long as they're respectful. We do have admin controls and we will delete people if necessary. But, you know, but but that's that's I think at the core things.

Fitness, as we know it right now doesn't work for everyone. And slapping things on top doesn't work for everyone. And so we're looking to dismantle structures and systems and rebuild something that does include everyone in a more effective way.

Joy: Yeah. So he invited me and he was like, you know, I'm interested in this when I first started like my IG page. And he was like, how do you define fitness? And I was like, OK, fine, let's have this conversation. So I talked to him. Maybe that was like 2017. And so and we've been connected ever since. He has stuff going on. He'll reach out to me if I have stuff going on. I was it we kind of give each other all this thing is coming up. Check this out, like that sort of thing. And so I would say, just as I'm probably most connected to as it relates to Fitness4AllBodies, I followed Ilya for years, I was just introduced to Roc last year. And so all three of them kind of add a perspective on fitness and movement and how it works in in in a yes. Perspective. Right. On movement that I think is necessary and I think that's that's needed. And so being able to kind of meet with them and connect with them has been awesome. Yeah. And but I would say, yeah, that's kind of how the relationship is happened. I've been on the Fitness4AllBodies panel and Ilya was also present during that time. But when it came out with Decolonizing Fitness. That was like something that I had my was on. So Roc was kind of like the newest person that I've actually come in contact with last year. So, yeah, it's like it grows every year and it's like a new person. Right. There's a new person that's kind of being added, but they're doing awesome work and so it's great to be a part of that community.

Fitness4AllBodies — Ilya Parker

Ilya: Yeah, sure. Justice is one of my sweet, sweet, sweet kindred and my comrades. I've learned so much from him because justice a lot of Roc, myself and Justice are our entrance is through grassroots organization, social justice and so back, I want to say 2012, 2013 somewhere. My years I met Justice through some grassroots organizing I don't even remember. And we had an opportunity to bring fitness into the mix. And that's when justices got my antennas up because I was like, oh shit. You talking about like fortifying your body, using fitness for revolutionary. I would just so hard because he blew my mind all still does all the time, and so we were working on this project for this nonprofit and I want to say it was like black trans man advocacy or something out of Texas. And so Justice was like, hey, here's the idea for the project. We're doing like this kind of like fitness programing tailored towards trans folks. And this is where we're going to do.

And all I remember is us having several conference calls about it and then having a retreat where we would flesh out more of the components for that project. And I think that's when working with just the vibe of the first time I also met him in person. And so the first time I met Roc in person and Nori in person, and it was a few other amazing folks who are still engaged in fitness, Preston and who went on to, I think, be the second runner up in like the first trans male bodybuilding competition. And it was quite brilliant, beautiful black trans people. And so we share, we love we grew, we talk, we learned throughout that we can. And it was actually in North Carolina where we had to retreat in Denver, North Carolina, just beautiful lake house. And so what I left from with that was, damn, I want to do this. I really, truly want to do this, staying with Roc and so Justice. And I lost a little bit of contact. Noori and Roc and I stay in touch and we we just our craft and our business is Roc and I's business came up pretty much around the same time where I've developed a resistance idea for fitness and move to decolonized fitness. And justice was always like that foundation that we constantly went to. Justice has been doing this for years and years and years and years. And he's always throughout his history of working in gyms, working and primarily white spaces, being a black coach who just give all these random different types of clients to be able to code to cultivate just just a brilliant way that he sees bodies. Even as

I want to go back a little bit, even as a physical therapist assistant when I work with him one on one. And I had difficulty with bench press in particular and just moving my body in certain ways without my end and injuries, just as was like now due to his duties, the way his cuing alone is verbal cueing alone is like no other, especially for him, even though he has a lot of certs, especially for him. I'm not going through like the rigorous, like school and that type of shooting to screw. So that in and of itself is just people don't give him enough credit for how phenomenal of coaches. And fast forward to through all the years of him developing, just his coaching and just just the background knowledge that he has within social justice, in particular, racial justice and gender justice, fitness for our bodies was bound to emerge from that. And I'm just very grateful that justice now has time to pour into his work and carve out a business in a capitalist industry. I hate that, you know what I mean? We got to be up under that. But he needs to get that type of recognition because people just don't be seeing him like this. And like I told you earlier, I came up with the hashtag, Justice actually came up with a hashtag called Justice For All Bodies, because I think he had another movement that we learn from, where he taught workshops from. And and so I pretty much send my copy Justice For All Bodies and created fitness for our bodies as a hashtag. And then now Justice came to me and was like, hey, I want to develop this curriculum and stuff around that and could I use "fitness for all bodies." Thank you. Spelling and a little bit different. And I was like, hell, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And so it's just an honor to now, years later, still be able to work and learn with them. And and yeah. Is just a pioneer. One of the pioneers that I learned from. I always say it.

Networks of Care in Fitness — Courtney Marshall

Bri: But that's something I've thought about when I just throw this out there.

Courtney: But it also shows like even more of, you know, when you talked earlier about Jim being an escape from, say, politics or identity, because I always feel that if it is, I wrote down your very significant care. You know, you have part of caring, though, really engaging with our biases, like what are the gaps in our knowledge? How have I learned not to care? For these people and and for me, I've often thought about it in terms of fat people, right? So I say you can't be fat phobic on the one hand, but then say you care about the fat bodies that are in the room with me. It doesn't it doesn't work. And that was like I was. That was really my entryway into thinking about what is the atmosphere that created. But yeah, I like what you said about how bodies hold memories, because, you know, and I maybe think when you were talking about our fitness, I mean, are there fitness instructors? Again, exercise? I don't know what we're using. These are because I often think about like I'm not meant to be a permanent fixture in their lives. Like, I come you come to class, you gain whatever, and then you're free to move alone. Where I don't feel because there's always somebody new, right? There's always even Zumba has been around for however many years. There's still somebody who have never done the class. Right. And then they're like, oh, wow, this was fun. Like, it wasn't it wasn't as horrible as I thought it was.

But I, I always think about how am I getting this person, what kind of relationship with my setting up so they know what to demand, what to ask for from the next person. I think about that in terms of working with with kids so high school now. So what memories am I creating with them now in 10th grade, 10th grade English class, so that later on I meet people and they ask me what do I do? And I'm like, oh, oh, I got to watch my grandma around anything like,

what is that about? Or when I meet, you know, there was a woman in my class, she has to be in her 50s and she had this we did this one song and it was a you had to pair up with people and you did like patty cakes and stuff like that. And she would always leave. And then she told me because when she was little, she never got picked for things. And so it was hard for her. And now she was someone who. I when I was a participant in Zumba class, like she was a participant with me, she saved me from being a participant to teach for a year. And I and I would tell people in my class, like we are friends, like we're one dance crew. But she still had that feeling. So it was like I never pushed her to do it or anything like that. But it was just it was odd to me, like just the memories that people bring to to these classes. And she was like, she just never got you. She was teased when she was little. It was just always it always bothered her. But like, she she her daughter would come like, really. But I mean, I had I couldn't say that at the moment. I was like, oh, OK. All right, I understand we can change. But the reason why I, I and I would always in all my class, we always do a song in a circle and we would do some kind of like battle song or like an interactive song was because I wanted them to take their eyes off me for what's right, but also start to like engage with each other. So it wasn't just like we're all sitting like looking at the lecture at the front of the room, but we're actually talking to each other. So I wonder, just when you talk about care, you know, how does that mean that we have to confront have to work, but we also have to articulate like we have to name it. Like I mean, I'm not saying that every gym has I mean, it would be nice if we had some type of ongoing I don't want to say perfection would go like ongoing commitment and. Yeah, no, never mind putting it in the hiring questions because you know that that's asking too much. Right. But really talking like, you know, how do you feel about, you know, not just, you know, how would you feel if somebody was using a wheelchair, but, you know, if somebody you know, how do you handle when somebody is not doing the exercise the way you envision them doing? What are the different ways you have of. I think about the yoga teachers, like asking, do you want to be touched? Do not want to be like those types of things? And again, I was never, ever trained in any of this. Right. In all the and I've been teaching I've been teaching Zumba for five years. And I know I've gotten my personal training and stuff along the way. I do have a spinning story, but I never thought it was good. But we have pedaling for Parkinson's and so I said that a couple of times. But now you just stand around and play music. I guess I do that. And then like other like pound, I tried to teach, I taught it to seniors.

Guiding Values & Economies of Care — Roc Rochon

Roc: Well, I guess there will just be one more thing that I've have these kind of guiding values and an embodied commitment for resistance, and that's like an evolution, because when I first started with resistance, I was focused on one on one training and with my schedule and and the influx of people, I was like, I'm talking trialed this group training thing and happens to be what I love. It brings in the collective. And so just just last year, I typed out some guiding values and like and embody commitment. And I think like when you talk about inclusive fitness, I think that's how we're coming to it. Like, yeah. And not just me. I literally mean, like the small group of people that you know about, like we are intentional about what we're trying to do. Like this is for me, for Rooted Resistance's queer and its trans led. It's queer, it is trans centered. And you know, I look at my organization or the program as a way of mutual aid. You know, it's a rejection of capitalist production, it's a rejection of that mode of production. And this is really what my dissertation is on. We have our own mode of value creation and production. So it's kind

of like flipping upside down. This the modes of production that we have been born into, like we're rejecting that. Like we don't need this to actually live and live in a functional way. So how do you have seven, like, embodied values that I'm really I'm working through? And I might add some more. But like one of them also is that resistance is only it's an affirming space for queer and trans people. That is an evolution, because when I first as of last year, because two people came to camp, cis people and cis heterosexual people and great, great misgendering people is not great and it's not optimal in a space that I'm facilitating. So what I did with my group was like we had like a potluck and I was like y'all like that's really cool. Create like this is a democratic space. What do you want in the in the growth of Rooted Resistance? What do you want in the growth of inclusive fitness or physical activity? And the stuff that came out of that helped me write these embodied values. They are the it's not just for me. Like if it was just for me, I probably would have three. It's from them. So we have seven. And I love that, though. And a part of that was like based off of their feedback. I'm like, you know what? This space is just for us. And I respect and love our comrades who are cis and heterosexual and they can support in other ways, you know? So I'm just claiming that as like a way that we create our spaces and we make our spaces safe. And that's not to say that there isn't anything that's ever harmful within our space, but we also hold each other accountable and responsible. Those are just some other things, and I don't think that's just Rooted Resistance saying I think it's a Fitness4AllBodies saying.

The Body, Land, and Nation — Roc Rochon

Roc: But there's so much and I think it starts with like because even for me, there are things that I know now that I didn't know before, you know, and I know my life experiences. And I would say the of resistance is was created all my life experiences. But there are things now that or in the last 15 years of my life, in the last decade of my life, that I'm that I'm putting still putting the puzzle pieces together. And apart of that around the body is like. It's its histories and histories on histories, on histories, and I think sometimes I mean in our history classes, in US education, you're literally learning dates in this kind of linear way and make it seem as though, oh, yeah, that was the past. But it's like, no, no, no. Like the continuities of history in regards to the body and how like. All the way from my Greek civilization, the glorification of the body to have a quote unquote fit esthetic and I'm putting it in quotes that I don't know what it is that it is, but from the terms of like the stereotypical the standard to be muscular was to be closer to God. It meant that you were there was some purity involved in these. And these things are like, you know, you you hear people today talking about like, you know, I got to look fit or I want this particular body. And it's like those ideas, those beliefs come from. Centuries of light from history of worlds that existed between Greek civilization, between the Roman Empire, so it's like Greek civilization was. Stronger body, strong relationship with God was connected to religion, spirituality, and then when you move into the Roman Empire, it's like your body is used for warfare, like you got to be strong so that you can kill the next person. All of these things, how do we see those things today? Even just that we can look at any mainstream league, you know, between competition or competitiveness and an individualized athlete who is competing with others and celebrity athletes like that. And even beyond that, it's like it's attached to status. It's attached to the military. You know, like this particular body prototype is attached to these different militarized and Christianity pieces. All of those things are still very much a part of our

history and our part of our present day. But they're things that are just kind of under that. The ideology that you're talking about is it's it's thrown under the towel.

It's thrown under the rug because, man, if people really knew how they were being psychologically manipulated, man, we might all be together. We might want to be like, wait a minute, I didn't know I did so. I think there's pieces of it that's just like a brief version of histories that exist, but those histories created the sporting body, that ideology. It's like histories of the body, histories of health reformers who would even say, like, you know, a woman's body needs to be healthy so that she can birth children. I mean, that's extremely gendered. I know people who are having children who aren't women. Right. So, I mean, what century are we in? It's just like these things are still very much alive and well in present day. And I think that's one of the biggest things that that's a myth where people are like, oh, yeah, women's or sports are so inclusive.

Bri: Right.

Roc: Are they?! All right… and so, like Patricio, like had a boxing match and he won just trans transgender boxer in like he won the championship. And that is amazing. And the amount of shit he's been through to get there. And then when we look at powerlifting and trans athletes aren't they're not allowed on the platform and they're being discriminated against. So like it's just like what do we mean? Even when we say inclusive, you know, it's like so that's a long winded answer.

Creating Rooted Resistance — Roc Rochon

Bri: No need to force it now. Yeah, and I would also I know I obviously want to talk about your own efforts through rooted resistance, of course. And, you know, I would love to hear and I apologize that I'm sure make you repeat something that you've already said many times before. It inevitably happens. But, you know, just talking a little bit about the history of Rooted Resistance and, you know, what its goals were and how you feel like it kind of fits into this eco system of efforts that are tied up in this movement now.

Roc: Yeah. So it's so fascinating because when I think about Rooted Resistance started in 2016 and started when I was living in Tampa, where I was just kind of sick of this gym and that powerlifting space. And I'm like, OK, we're just going to do this ourselves. And I'm like. A lot of trans identified people are trans people were hitting me up like, can you help me masculinized my body? And I would like give them a little workout plan, something that they could do from home. And I would always ask, do you have a gym membership? And some people did. And there were some people who I would go train with, like at their gym. And I have to I was just like, we don't need this space. Like, we do not need it. So I think thinking about how everything started years ago now, you know, it was always in the outdoors.
That was always a component of Rooted Resistance. And there's a quote by bell hooks. And I don't know if you remember this one from one of the panels, but I kind of read it to you now because the Sisters of Black Women in recovery. But I'm going to read this and then now I'm going to tell you more about this.

BMS: Please do.

RR: So it's, "recalling the legacy of our ancestors who knew that the way we regard land in nature will determine the level of our self-regard. Black people must reclaim a spiritual legacy or we connect our well-being to the well-being of our collective black recovery takes place when we begin to renew our relationships to the earth. And we remember the way of our ancestors. When the earth is sacred to us, our bodies can also be sacred, sacred to us. This is necessary for healing."

And and it's just like. That is it, that is the connection piece of even why I feel drawn to being an outdoors and but it's also like. And part of this body land reconciliation or really reckoning before reconciliation about all of the trauma that has occurred, all of the violence like the indigenous erasure, indigenous erasure from the reservation to the political economy of the plantation and all of the human bodies that were just devalued and disregarded completely and then being dispossessed from your home. So it's like what is a way that queer and trans people, non binary, gender nonconforming people and even to spirit people can come to the Earth in a way to reckon with all of that reckoning, with things within our bodies that we hold and things within the ecosystem of the land. So that's the premise of Rooted Resistance. How can I encourage us? How can I call us to move our bodies in the outdoors without reckoning with colonialism? Like, to me, I can't like I, I, I'm unable to do that. So it's like facilitating this program is is really about land and bodies and it's dialogue centric and it's feeling powerful in the body that we have, not the one that we feel we have to have because of proscribed notions of of it. It's it's really a refusal to those commercialize ideas.

Concepts of Access in the Gym — Lore McSpadden

Bri: So yeah. But from your other answer, I think that is leads in really well to talking about Positive Force Movement. And you know, you throughout the things that you've shared, I've heard a lot about just how you set up the space and those, you know, sometimes I think kind of tricky decisions about like, you know, the inherently gray area of access and things like that is in a lot of what I've read about and heard from other people in this kind of movement, like, for example, like rock from rooted resistance and stuff like that is you know that you I know that, you know, this is like you have to create these spaces intentionally. You can't just make a space that you think looks like a gym and try to add, you know, things like inclusion and access on top of it. And so I would really love to hear more about the process that you and your wife, like, went through in creating the space.

Lore: Well, it's actually really convenient in the sense that. She and I both have different neurodiversity, right, and which sometimes have conflicting driving, which, like we like to talk through, like, first of all, be like. OK, as promised, survivors with neurodiversity and Christine has chronic pain and I have sensory sensitivity, and we're both that right. Like you talk through like. What will go especially to what our contradictory needs are in space and brainstorm solutions and- and then, yeah, the like the awareness is so great, it has to be not just that's where we start, right. But then we have to get to not just like. Who what we need and what our current students needs are, but like who do we want to invite into the space? And you know nothing about us without us, like, how do we seek out information directly from the source, not from something like Autism Speaks bullshit equivalent thereof? But there really is a difference between. Can I access this space and do I want to be there?

BMS: Yeah, right.

LM: So, looking at the like the first time, like every sensory like I've ever felt like, you know, sight, smell, sound, touch, like thinking through like. What are the things that exist in gyms that create these, you know, smell like all of that, like why create these sensory experiences and how do we provide different? Options for each of them and then also like. What are- I feel like if I talk about this too vague, I don't know that I'm giving anything useful.

BMS: No this is actually really, really good. Please feel free to continue to.

Lore: And. And then like it- it helps like building authentic relationships with. You know, people who are affected by different means, paying people for their consulting and ideas and thoughts and. I mean, everything from like where do we place the kettlebell rock to, what colors do we paint? The wall is like. Christine loves the color black and I love jewel tones, and we could have created a place that was so dark and heavy that appealed to our static's, it would not have been a welcoming space. And if someone, you know, was entering while navigating. Anything from claustrophobia to depression to just being scared to enter a movement space for the first time, it could have been horrible. I mean and I mean, it's also like, OK, we're going to be doing a lot of video recording, like we need to have the walls behind us be solid colors. And I guess we might have patterned curtains, but like, if we're going to be signing or demonstrating movement. We need to make sure that what's behind us is too busy. I mean, even into thinking about, like, what you wear to work, I on I have like.

Some students, again, who navigate life with blindness and all wear a neon orange shirt on the days wear like or or something like that, the wall behind where I mostly coach is kind of a rich purple. And then there is also a very light teal wall. And depending on where I'm going to set up for someone's fashion, make sure I'm wearing something that will be visible to the person I'm coaching. Right, right. Like I have a lot of clothes that match the wall behind where I often coach. I'm not going to wear them when I'm coaching. That's like I I've gotten off topic.

BMS: No, not at all. This is like one hundred percent on track.

LM: But I don't know if, you know, we have to step outside of our lives to experience, acknowledge we're not the experts on everything and really think anything that you have to make a decision about in regards to your space. Is this something that is a potential to either move you closer to or further from creating a welcoming space?

BMS: Hmm.

LM: You know, any time I like and this is going to mean something different, like we were in the fortunate position of being able to create our space. Even if you work in someone else's gym, you know, you can think through what part of the gym is likely to have the most background noise. Is there a separate room? If there is a separate room, what lighting options are there? You know, I I worked at a gym in Boston where I requested that they get some floor lamps so that, you know, having the overhead lights on was optional. Right. Right. You know, like what? Like, any time you have a choice to make, do it. Intentionally, I don't just have branding or

aesthetics. What you think about, think about like. What needs might someone have in relation to this aspect of space creation.

REFLECTIONS WITH JUSTICE WILLIAMS

Transcript from Video Interview

Bri: Actually, perfect, because the like last section of this is where, uh, I talk, well mostly I just highlight the number of ways that people discuss what they have worked to create through the spirit of this movement. Um, you know, so Lore ends up talking about their experience of you know, uh, creating their gym Positive Force Movement. Roc talks about Rooted Resistance, you know, Joy talks about the Jabbie App, and all of these different ways of creation. Um, and os you actually keep leading into each section perfectly talking about, you know, this one your vision, um, and I was wondering if you could speak a little bit more to what you are wanting to create and like what your dreams and visions are in full?

Justice: I think that there is an umbrella over us that doesn't allow us to see the light. My vision is to help people understand what that umbrella looks like so that we could take it down, right. So a while ago, I did a lot of activism around just being trans and Black, and I was like that's great and all, but it's actually not making the change that we need to happen. What I am doing is creating a space for that piece of myself, but not where it needs to be and it's hard because of white supremacist culture to maintain those spaces because in capitalism you need to pay, you need to do this right, so eventually those places fade. It may go away.

What I'm trying to say is that we're going to reclaim our space together therefore we're all thriving together and in the needs, we need to be to ourselves we take that time because we need it but action and activism always looks like us as a unit, because that's the most powerful thing I've ever seen. When we can really accept that we are connected, when we can really let go of the ideas that we inhale, because we're always questioning, we're always tapping into some source that holds us accountable for our individual responsibility. As a member of our larger community, that's what I want Fitness4AllBodies to be, that hub, that reminder, and that real quick hug, so that you get healed and get right back out there. Because the work continues.

Yes, it's large, because we got hundreds of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years to go against, but the funny thing is that it's actually quicker like the quicker picker-upper if we do it together. It really is. And so we have to see the ways that we are connected, because we have been lied to over and over again. And we are bombarded with who we are, horrible ideas, and messages that we even hold about ourselves in this community, and so we're dr- I understand we're working through all of this but we won't truly change things the way they need to be changed, which means we have to change our relationship to whiteness. This includes white people. I didn't say change our relationship to white people, which we kind of have to do, but it's really the infection of whiteness and these ideas that permeate throughout all cultures that whiteness has touched, colonized, been next to, near of, sat in a park with it, really just doesn't matter, right, so we think that because of history, because of the erasure of the construct through history. We believe that this is our norm. This is the way it should be. We have to believe that's not true.

When you put up a sign that says “Black Lives Matter” you are telling me that all of the institutions that created this very like, the deaths of those Black lives, that you’re performative around, we’re actively taking our own individual responsibility to create true change and that’s not just an advertisement. It’s an action. It’s an action that we do like a ritual daily because oppression happens every month, every breath. It’s not different because we have some comfit and in spaces we see, we’re still the same n*****. When we go into stores or we go into, you know, the cop pulls up and we raise our hands and we still get shot at. So, performative don’t work. Performative is a tool of toxic masculinity, of toxic white supremacy. I no longer am a theater about my life. I want to live my life in community with others that framed off real love. That’s Fitness4AllBodies.

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